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THE COUNTESS'S CROSS.

VOL. II.



THE COUNTESS'S CROSS.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Lady Caroline was fairly out of sight, Madeline, who had watched her through the open street-door, and who was for a moment struck dumb with astonishment, turned and walked upstairs into Arthur's studio. There she beheld relics of the storm that had taken place—a chair lay overturned in one place, where Lady Caroline's ample, fashionable skirts had hurled it to the floor; near the door was a glove, dropped and forgotten in the passion of the moment; Arthur's brushes and palette were strewn on the ground, as he had thrown

them from him in his eager expostulations with his mother ; and he himself, the sunny, joyous-hearted youth, sat with his face buried in his hands, apparently overpowered by grief. Madeline saw all this, though she paused but for a moment on the threshold, then, advancing with her light step, unheard by Arthur, she approached him, and put her hand upon his shoulder. At the soft touch he quivered, as if an electric shock had passed through him ; then, lifting his head, he showed her a countenance disfigured by sorrow and passion, in which the light had vanished from the eyes, and the blue veins stood out gnarled and knotted on the forehead. Madeline's voice forsook her, she dared not ask what had happened, she felt it must be something dreadful, something fatal, that would perhaps shatter her frail fabric of happiness to the ground. At last she gasped forth, " Arthur, my darling, my

own love, speak to me, speak to your wife!"

He took her in his arms, he clasped and pressed her, as if clinging in her embrace to the hopes he had just lost. His grasp was so nervous, so firm, that it almost gave her pain, and, like a fluttering, frightened bird, she strove to release herself.

"Yes, my wife," he murmured, wildly, "my own lawful wife; none can take you from me, and the world may speak what it likes, may mock with its icy finger—I do not care, I will not listen! You are my own—my Madeline!"

The girl knelt beside him; she stroked his hair, she softly murmured soothing words of love, and tenderly looked up into his eyes to see if the anger had left his brow, if the dark, threatening gleam had vanished.

"And now tell me," she said, as he subsided into silence, and his fiercely clenched hand dropped quietly into her lap—"now

tell me what it was, Arthur—you know I have a right to your confidence?"

"Not this, darling—not this. I must not, dare not tell you. You shall not know the wickedness of the world, your innocent mind shall not be poisoned by the darts of malice and jealousy. Trust in me, Madeline—I am strong. I am your husband, and I can bear all for you!"

"No, no, Arthur," urged Madeline, "the bitter will be sweet when I share it with you; do not let us theorize, but let us practise—love diminishes the pain when shared; and how could I enjoy with you, if I did not suffer with you?"

"Angel!" he muttered, as he kissed her fair, upturned brow; "and it is you they have calumniated thus! No, no, Madeline, I cannot tell you this."

She rose mournfully from her knees, and raising the glove that lay forgotten, she said,

"This is your mother's, Arthur; shall I take it, or send it to her to-morrow?"

"By God!" exclaimed he, starting to his feet, and snatching the glove from her. "Never enter her house again; do you hear, Madeline?—never cross her accursed threshold! You shall never be exposed to indignity as long as you have the shelter of my roof, and the protection of my name! I will die rather than that you should be insulted."

"Ah!" said Madeline, "then it was about me you quarrelled, and on my account your mother was so angry? Oh! Arthur, Arthur, could you not trust me even thus much?—do you not know that I am yours body and soul, and that I would return to my native country, and bid adieu for ever to the bliss I have tasted with you, rather than that one moment of sorrow or annoyance should be yours? Oh! Arthur, Ar-

thur, I thought you knew me better, and understood what woman's love is—how self-denying, how utterly humble and unselfish it must be !”

She stood before him, her dark eyes veiled with tears, her beautiful mouth quivering with pain. Arthur looked at her ; he dared not trust himself to give a second glance, and taking her hand, while he turned away his head, he said—

“Darling, forgive me if I have pained you—it was only my wish to save you suffering ; but perhaps, after all, as you say, it is best you should know the truth—indeed,” he muttered to himself, “society will soon teach it her in its rude, heartless way, and it is best she should learn it from loving, gentle lips.” “Madeline,” he began again, feverishly, “I cannot tell you now, but you shall know to-day—yes, this very day—what my sorrow is, and how ill I have

treated you in bringing you into my family, though God knows I did it for the best. Go now, my own darling wife ; I want a few moments to compose myself, and I will soon join you."

Madeline, in her winning, submissive way, kissed him quietly, and departed without a murmur, though she would fain have entreated not to be left so long in uncertainty. Seated again in her pretty boudoir, with the birds singing, and the gorgeous flowers emitting their sweet, almost overpowering fragrance around her, Madeline's hands drooped in her lap, and her thoughts wandered—wandered restlessly, as she recalled the events of the morning. And it was about *her* Lady Caroline and Arthur had quarrelled—how, in what way could it affect the proud, patrician mother? To be sure the simple-minded Italian girl had not been brought up in luxury—did not rejoice

in any proud appellation beyond the unstained name of Scarsi (which Madeline always imagined as good and honourable a name as she would fain have wished it to be); to be sure the warm heart had nothing besides itself and its innocence to give; but then Arthur was too noble to care for riches. Had he not stooped to the dowerless maiden, and ought not a mother's heart to beat proudly at this evidence of her son's character?

Thus argued the young wife, in her utter ignorance of the world and its maxims. She knew not that in it money is the great mainspring, and that even blood and honour must bow before the Juggernaut car of unrighteous Mammon. As to imagining for one moment that any imputation of dishonour or disgrace could rest upon her own or her mother's name, and that Arthur himself would be dragged down in their fall, such

an idea never entered Madeline's head, and had it done so, it would have been scouted by her pure, guileless heart with all possible warmth and indignation. Yet the cause of the quarrel, whose effects seemed still so terrible, remained as great a mystery as ever, and Madeline could only sit lost in dreamy wonder, doubting whether, after all, the initiation into life, and the dreams of a woman's life, entirely compensated for the sorrow and knowledge of evil it brings with it.

But Madeline was young—but a child in years, and scarcely more in mind, so she rose and shook off the unpleasant thoughts that crowded in upon her, and bent over her flowers in hopes of dispelling amongst them all bitter thoughts.

As she was thus occupied, the boy in buttons opened the door and peered cautiously in; he was still rather frightened at the re-

membrance of Lady Caroline's determined manner, and the noisy words he had heard not reluctantly, as he stood on the stairs, and of which he had given his opinion in the kitchen as "an awfully jolly row. I expected every moment that somebody would be pitched out of window!" And so he entered Mrs. Dormer's room, expecting still to find some person ready to pour down a shower of wrath upon his devoted head; but he beheld only his mistress rather paler than usual, bending dreamily over her cherished flowers; and thus he took heart, for Madeline was gentle with her servants, and never scolded in the rough tone some ladies think it housewifely to adopt; so he said, after clearing his throat with a preparatory shake, something between a cough and a sneeze,

"There's a genelman wishes to see you, mum."

Madeline turned quickly round.

"What is it, Charles?—a gentleman wishes to see me? Oh! it must be some mistake; perhaps it is Mr. Dormer he wants?"

"No, mum; he said partickler it was you he wished to see—he ses he's a old acquaintance of yours, mum, and he looks a furrin-looking genelman, and he wears a sort of religious dress—black and tight, mum."

Charles had often heard it discussed downstairs that Mrs. Dormer was a Roman Catholic; and *that*, in his mind, meant a strange amalgamation of heresy and traitordom, in which the Pope was chiefly concerned in plots like that of Guy Fawkes, and the fifth of November was regarded as a day to be kept holy, and only to be exorcised by Protestants chalking up in large letters, "No Popery!" and strange drawings, entirely out of perspective, of gibbets, and small bodies

attached to very large heads dangling from them ; and therefore the mysterious stranger who wore a religious dress, was invested in the boy's eyes with a halo of horror and curiosity. Perhaps *now* he should find out what "them Roman Catholics did plot and hatch, and what their hidden meetings were about, and he might himself denounce them, and receive public thanks from both Houses of Parliament, and the Queen in her robes, with a sceptre in her hand, as we see her depicted in the brilliant spelling-books of our infancy, and be pointed out as the benefactor of England."

Meanwhile Madeline had twice repeated, "Show the gentleman in ; I do not know who he can be, but I will receive him," before Charles had recovered from his speculations, and had at last executed her orders.

When the gentleman was shown in with

great pomp by grinning buttons, Madeline gave a start of surprise, and springing forward, exclaimed in joyous tones,

“Padre Stefano, you in England!”

“Yes, my child, come to look after my well-beloved daughter, and bear her messages from her mother!” answered the priest in solemn tones, looking with a keen gaze round the apartment.

“Sit down, father,” urged Madeline, leading him into the room, and with gentle force making him drop into a luxurious arm-chair; “sit down, father. And so you have come from Italy?—and how is my dear mother?—and when did you leave?—and how long are you going to stay?—and did you really come all this way to see me?”

A shower of questions fell from her lips, as, excitedly and yet respectfully, the girl-wife knelt beside her confessor, and waited to hear the tidings of joy she felt were in

store for her. The priest sighed heavily, and then spoke thus,

“I am glad, Maddalena, to see you thus joyous and happy. I only hope that amongst the pomps and vain pleasures of the world, you have not forgotten our holy religion, and the vows of self-denial and obedience you so often repeated to me at the confessional?”

“Oh! no, father,” answered Madeline, her ardour a little damped; “I am as earnest as ever in the worship of the Holy Virgin and the saints; though I confess I have perhaps at times wandered too much in my heart to the pleasant enjoyments of the world; and I have not sought absolution from the Church, as I knew no priests here to whom I could go with confidence and humility.”

“All priests, my child, are the appointed of God,” answered the Padre; “and as

such, equally deserving of your respect and confidence. And have you also sought to win happiness by denying yourself in the service of religion? Is your husband converted yet?" The priest lowered his tone, which was cold and severe, and bent his piercing black eyes upon the blushing Madeline. "Ah! I see," he said, after a pause, "it is as I thought, that too has been neglected. Well, Maddalena" (the Italian appellation struck strangely on her ear after her long disuse of it), "if you have neglected your religion, your mother and I have not. I expected as much, and I have come to England to watch over you with a father's eye, and give you any advice and sympathy you may require."

It might have seemed to English ideas that a married woman needs no advice and sympathy from any man except her husband; but to Madeline, accustomed to the

habits of obedience of a zealous Catholic, there was nothing strange or out of place in Padre Stefano's assumption of authority.

"I am glad, father," she murmured, humbly, "to have you here. And how is my dear mother?"

"The sainted woman is well," answered the priest; "but she frets after her daughter, and the only thing that will give her real peace will be to hear that that daughter has persevered in the steps of obedience and humility in which she was educated."

"Ah!" exclaimed Madeline, throwing herself on the priest's neck, "she frets, does she, darling mother?—what an ungrateful girl I was to leave her; and I would never, never vex her now, had I her but with me. Oh! for the sea, the deep blue sea of Italy, and the cloudless sky and the waving olives, and the fragrant orange-trees!—oh! how I miss you all. I see the little white

house now, and the view from my window, and I hear the *angelus* bell sounding so tinkling, so home-like—oh! Italia, Italia bella!”

Madeline loosened her hold, and sinking back into her chair, burst into hysterical tears. Her impulsive Italian nature had been stirred by the familiar tones—the familiar images came crowding in upon her, and her present life, with its new hopes and fears, its vague sorrows, and scarce-tasted joys, sank into the far background. As the happy hours of her childhood once more became vividly present to her memory, a vague yearning for the maternal breast, an aching longing to see the blue sky, to feel the balmy air of Italy once more fan her cheek, seized her, and she experienced that bitter, that incurable sensation called home-sickness.

Padre Stefano watched her varying moods with pleasure; he was glad to see his em-

pire still unshaken, his power of impressing the mobile clay of Madeline's mind, and moulding it as he chose, still existing; but he did not wish to encourage her home-sickness too much, lest it should escape from the bonds he chose to lay upon it, and baffle his efforts to keep his pupil quiet and resigned within his sway. Thus he broke the silence and exclaimed, more gaily than before—

“This is a pretty welcome for a young bride to give—tears—and in the first honeymoon period of your marriage! Rouse yourself, my daughter, this is no compliment to your husband—by-the-bye, where is he?”

Madeline smiled through her tears, and a flush mantled her cheeks, as she thought of her handsome, golden-haired husband, who still treated her as his idol, and whose grief, lest she might be saddened, had only this afternoon been so intense.

“You must see him,” exclaimed Madeline,

starting towards the door, with the wet drops still in her eyes. Then, stopping short, she returned to the Padre, and said—
“Of course you will spend the day with us, will you not, and dine here?”

“The priest bowed acquiescence, and said,

“As you are so kind, Maddalena, I will. I am an old man, and the long journey from Italy has tired me; I shall not be sorry to sit down a little quietly, and I daresay you want to hear all about home.”

“Oh! yes,” answered Madeline, “my mother has only written once, and I long to know all about her. I will just run and fetch Arthur, and then return. Please sit down, Padre, and make yourself comfortable.”

Madeline left the room, and the old man began to pace the apartment in a way that belied his assertion of the intense fatigue he was suffering; he looked at the pictures, he

examined the china, he peered into the books, and studied everything with a keen, hungry curiosity.

"The same as ever," he muttered to himself, during his observations. "The same studious habits, the same artistic tastes. All right—all right. It is not the quiet, unworldly scholar, whose room is his world, that is the difficult one to manage—to them habit is religion, and they have no time to rebel; it is the volatile, flighty, pleasure-seeker who emancipates himself from my control, and laughs to scorn the precepts he cannot understand."

The good father's cogitations were here interrupted by the entrance of Madeline and her husband, whom she held by the hand. Padre Stefano seated himself quickly, and appeared absorbed in the book he had taken up.

"Ah! Padre, how are you?" said Mr.

Dormer, giving the priest his hand in the honest, open way in which he always welcomed his friends.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Madeline, pointing to her husband with joyous pride—"here is my dearest Arthur, who was so loth to leave his studio. I had quite a battle with him!"

"You did not tell me it was Padre Stefano, dear," said Arthur reproachfully, "and I was very busy just then."

"No, I only said it was a friend of mine!" exclaimed his wife, dancing round him; "but you should be glad to see *all* my friends. Oh! Padre, is not he looking well and handsome?"

The priest smiled the sad, contemptuous smile of him who knows and feels for no innocent enjoyment; but said nothing.

"I am really glad to see you," continued Arthur; "and I hope you consider that I

have taken good care of my little Italian piece of impetuosity, and will give a good account of her to her mother. She is a dear little wife, is Madeline, and has her own way in everything."

"Child!" exclaimed his wife, giving his cheek a playful pat, as she brushed past him to leave the room. "I wish to give you an Italian dish for dinner," she said, turning to the priest, "that you may not feel homesick; and so I will go and see about it."

As the door closed on Madeline, Arthur's joyous smile faded, and gave place to a careworn look, and he said to his visitor,

"You came at a most opportune moment, Father Stefano, for I am greatly in want of your advice. Everything has gone well hitherto, but, alas! to-day the thunderbolt has fallen—my mother knows Madeline's history!"

"Indeed!" ejaculated the priest, his face

falling nearly as much as Arthur's had done —“indeed ! and pray how did that come about ?”

“ I cannot tell how she learnt it, but she knew the facts, and came here for me to contradict them. Of course I could not, and tried to pacify her, without avail. The worst is, like all women, she cannot or will not reason, and flies away at a tangent with all sorts of ideas—nay, worse, accusations ; and Heaven knows what horrible things she does not imagine poor Madeline guilty of.”

“ Santa Maria !” said the priest, “ this is very bad !”

“ It is indeed ; but I always feared it from the first—you know I said so. The fact is, I ought never to have married Madeline. I have put her in a false position, which I am afraid will entail great suffering on her ; and I who know the world, and the opinions current among my family, ought never to

have been so foolish. Madeline is an angel, Padre, and it goes to my heart to think that I have entailed any misery upon her."

"Pish!" answered the priest impatiently; "she can bear a little suffering as well as other people. Does she know her origin yet?"

"No; but *there* is the difficulty. She is sure to hear taunts and insinuations, if not the blunt truth, should she ever go to my mother's; and if she *never* does, still she must learn why they turn a cold shoulder upon her, which I know my mother too well not to be certain will be the consequence of to-day's disclosure, and I begin to think it would be well that she should hear the truth from some kind friend; but I confess myself powerless to destroy her faith in human goodness, and blast her love and confidence. What do you think? could *you* do it?"

"Not only can I do it," said Padre Stefano, "but I will and must do it; the child shall not be left longer in ignorance, or she may commit some folly. I will tell her this evening."

"Thanks, father. I suppose it is better it should be done soon; but I am so sorry—poor Madeline!"

The priest resumed, as if he had not heard the last remark—"You say Lady Caroline knows all the facts—whose daughter, then, does she believe Madeline to be?"

"Madame Scarsi's, of course," said Arthur, impatiently wondering what the priest was driving at.

"But I mean," said Padre Stefano, "has she any idea or surmise as to the father?"

"Ah!" answered Arthur, quickly—"yes, I do now recollect she said she had heard of a Madame Scarsi, who lived at Milan as the mistress or wife of Colonel Vesey."

"Ha! a most important disclosure," said the priest, gaily; "perhaps we are nearing our object. Can you tell me more of Colonel Vesey?"

"Nothing, except that he is a profligate old man—the last person in the world to have married a penniless Italian girl, though it is extremely likely he seduced her. He is now Lord Mountjoy, as he succeeded to a cousin's title."

"Well, well," said the priest, "all this is satisfactory; but hush! here comes Maddalena."

It was told. The blow had fallen. Madeline sat at the Padre's feet with her head drooping, and her hands clasped, like a broken flower. She knew all—she knew now her mother's secret, her mother's shame; she knew now that her name even was a reproach, and that in the eyes of the

world she was worse than nothing—a creature that had no right to exist—that had not even a father or a name.”

“My darling—my own love,” whispered Arthur, “forgive me if I have kept this from you—it was to save you grief.”

“Thanks, Arthur,” she forced herself to say, though her throat was parched, and her eyes dry and burning, and utterance even was painful; “you have been very, very generous. Oh! how can I repay you?—to have taken a dishonoured, friendless girl to your bosom, and given me your own, your spotless name—oh! indeed, it is too much!”

“Do not speak so, Madeline,” said he, earnestly. “As my wife, your interests are mine—to shield your honour and fair fame is to save mine. Do not talk of generosity between us; you know not how gladly I would give up everything to you; and

hitherto I have been well repaid, for you have been the joy—the pride of my life.”

Thus he urged, and sought to comfort her, while the priest sat silent by, his brow knitted with deep thought, and pondering how he could turn all this to his own purposes and deep-laid designs.

When Madeline went to bed that night, she prayed long and ardently—prayed that she might live to repay her husband's generosity, and that it might be graciously granted to her to bring his footsteps into the pale of the true Church; and when at last she slept, she was startled out of her repose by a dream, in which she saw her husband struggling in the tortures of purgatory, and heard him vainly crying to her for help, while she was held back by an invisible power, and could do nothing to save him, except shed bitter tears of agony and despair.

CHAPTER II.

LORD CHILLINGWORTH'S proposition had been duly carried out; an Ascot party was arranged, and one of those charming villa residences, in which the neighbourhood of Ascot abounds, was taken for the occasion, for the small trifle of one hundred and twenty pounds for the week. The weather was as bright and genial as any pleasure-seeker could have wished—indeed, the numerous gipsies and itinerant hawkers, whom you might have seen for days before tramping along the dusty highroad, sincerely hoped for a day's rain to cool the burning air, and lay the clouds of dust which each careless foot raised in a whirlwind, that filled the eyes and noses of the

wayfarers almost to suffocation. But no rain fell, and the ladies rejoiced as they spread out their fresh muslin and gauzy dresses, and said, without fear, that they would certainly not be spoilt by any adverse shower.

The Chillingworths' party consisted of her sister and Mr. Fortescue, who, unable to spare the whole week to pleasure, ran up to town for four days out of the six, in an uncomfortable manner,—Sir Ronald Minton, Captain Maxwell, and two other celebrities of the turf. Gertrude, indifferent as she was, and feeling it necessary to drown thought in the turmoil of gaiety, was yet glad that Sir Ronald was there, as with him she could talk of music and other things besides racing, and therefore the whole party looked forward to a week of satisfaction, if not happiness. Early in the mornings, Lord Chillingworth and Captain Maxwell sallied forth, attired in plain shooting suits, and walked on

to the race-course to see the horses gallop. To them the affairs of the week were business, and not pleasure, and any one who who had seen them debating with eager, serious faces, as to the various merits of the racers, or heard their long consultations about weights, forage, handicaps, "pullings," and such like, would have wondered what enjoyment such a serious and difficult matter could possibly afford them. Lord Chillingworth, I must confess, did it out of pure love of horse-flesh—he was as happy a loser as he was a generous winner; all was the same to him—even the glorious uncertainty of the turf was dearer to him than would have been a positive donation; as long as he was looking at horses, criticising their merits, feeling their legs, and giving directions to his jockey or his trainer, no man could be said to be more happy. With Captain Maxwell, on the contrary, money

was the first object, and fame the next; as long as he heard people calling him the luckiest and cleverest fellow on the turf, his bosom beat proudly; but the loaves and fishes were of more importance still. If he lost, he was never downcast, but set to work more diligently than before to see what he could mend, and where lay his mistake; if he won, he was not elated, but quietly considered how he could still further improve his prospects. It will easily be seen from this that neither gentleman cared for the ladies, or the society of the Ascot gathering; the pretty *coup d'œil* of the Cup day was quite lost upon them; the delights of a champagne and mayonnaise of chicken-lunchen were overlooked; and even the soft and encouraging glances of many a fair dame, anxious to bet a pair of gloves, or a charming "discretion," were not perceived by them. Their time was chiefly spent in

elbowing through the hot and crowded ring, jostled by red-faced "legs," and trainers, with a strong scent of onions and humanity adhering to their persons ; or in the saddling enclosure, watching the operations of the jockeys and stable-boys, or criticizing the appearance of horses as they walked round and round before the time for their races came on.

Old Plumper, Lord Chillingworth's trainer, was in high good humour. His horses had arrived, they had eaten well the night before, and were to all appearances as flourishing as could be wished; and now on this the first day of the races there were several "good things" which seemed made for them, and which, as Plumper confidentially assured his lordship, "they could not lose." Plumper had a rosy face, with two small, sparkling, laughing eyes, and a comfortable body, supported on two thin little legs; he was wont, when indulging in a comfortable talk with his friends over a

glass of "summut hot," to pat these two little legs, and glancing at them lovingly, to say, "These 'ere legs has won me many a race. When I was a lad, my father used to clap me atop of a 'oss, one of the best in the stable, and he used to say, 'Now, Bill, you stick tight, and give 'im his 'ead, and put your spurs in, and go right in and win.' And sure enough I did my werry best; and when, at last, one day I won a race, the Hemperor of Roosha warn't a happier man than I was; and when I got 'ome, Lor bless yer! if my mother didn't take me up in her arms, and give me a kiss, and said I should make her name famous yet. Lord bless yer! they talks of the glory of being in the Houses of Parliament, and that; it's my belief there's no happiness or glory like that of a young cove wot's won his fust race, and receives his fiver from the master. Ain't he cock of the walk that day, and don't the gals look at him

just ! I've brought my Bill up to that perfection ; and I says to 'im, ' You foller in the steps of yer father, and you'll be a great man yet ! ' He rides werry well, does Bill, though I don't tell him so, for fear of setting him up ! "

In such like amiable converse was old Plumper wont to indulge ; and young Bill was really, as his father said, a promising lad. He was to ride to-day one of Lord Chillingworth's crack horses, as he was a feather-weight, and the horse was but a two-year old. It was the horse's first appearance at a large race-meeting, and as his owner had kept his performances pretty dark, the " legs " were not sweet upon him ; so that Captain Maxwell reckoned on getting a long price about him, and booking some advantageous bets. He had just gone into the " ring " to see about them, and Plumper was standing in the paddock looking at his son,

who was mounting the horse, who went by the name of "Wild Peter."

"Now, Bill," he said, "remember my orders, you're to ride a waiting race. Wild Peter never tires, and you're to come with a rush at the end. Now, mind you don't wait too long before you make the final effort; you takes 'im short by the 'ed, and holds him within himself till it's time to win."

"Yes, father," answered the boy, as he sprang lightly into the saddle, while Wild Peter sniffed and snorted in a truly alarming manner, to the nerves of any one but a professional jockey. The boy rode him in a snaffle bridle, and to the uninitiated it seemed wonderful that seven stone four should be able to rein in with so small a help the prancing, pawing animal. But Bill had no fear, and if he had had, his father had decided that he should ride Wild Peter, and that was sufficient. Lord Chillingworth, with

a large cigar in his mouth, lounged near; Captain Maxwell did his commission for him, and he preferred watching the horses. He walked up to Bill, and patting the impatient Wild Peter's neck, he said,

"Remember, if you win, I'll give you an extra fiver for your pains."

The boy grinned with delight, and old Plumper led him out on to the course. Lord Chillingworth's colours were a bright sky blue, and as Wild Peter cantered past the stand, his glossy chestnut neck looking almost golden in the sun, and the light shining on every vein and wrinkle of his beautiful coat, many a glance of admiration followed him, and even to the uninitiated eyes of the ladies he looked certain to win.

"I should like to bet a pair of gloves on *that* horse," said the Lady Fanny Slapdash, who was rather inclined to be "fast," and thought betting a vastly good speculation.

"Which horse?" asked her admirer, young Jenkyns, in the Blues, who wore a rose in his button-hole, and an eye-glass in his eye, as he squinted round to discover which was her ladyship's attraction.

"There, that one," said Lady Fanny—"that beautiful golden chestnut, ridden by the blue jacket. What a little boy it is!—dear me! I wonder he can hold him!"

"Oh! you know," answered young Jenkyns, proud of his sporting knowledge, "those boys are always older than they look; their fathers stunt their growth with gin. I daresay, now, that one is five-and-twenty, though he rides so light. Ah! I see it is Chillingworth's horse. I should think it was a good one. Well, what do you say?" continued he—"shall we have a bet?"

"Oh! yes, yes," said Lady Fanny, carelessly, turning to fresh interests. "I shall

have quite a 'book' on this race. What would mamma say if she knew it!"

Captain Maxwell had by this time emerged from the ring. He complacently buttoned his betting-book into his breast-pocket, and said, as he neared Lord Chillingworth—

"Well, I got capital odds. Bird in the Bush is favourite—ha! ha! how little they know about it! Why, Wild Peter can win in a canter, if only Bill rides properly."

Old Plumper had now joined them, and the three stood behind the ladies' stand, straining their eyes to see what the horses were doing down in the hollow.

"Such a lot of 'em, you know," said Plumper, "they'll not be got off this 'our. Well, I pity them wot gets behind Wild Peter's 'eels; he air a rare 'un to kick, and he does it all so playful-like, you can't find it in your 'eart to be angry."

"I hope Bill can sit him," said Captain Maxwell.

"Bless your 'eart, sir, he could sit on a wild helephant; he ain't my son for nothing."

A silence ensued, only the voices of the card-sharpers or "Aunt Sally" owners, requesting customers to try their luck, broke on the ear; or now and then a feeble offer from a man in the ring to "bet against anything bar one," sounded hoarsely. At last even these voices stopped, and a dead quiet reigned.

All at once the bell rang. "They're off!" went through the dense masses of the crowd, as each man endeavoured to raise himself higher above his neighbour's head. A cry of astonishment from Plumper burst forth.

"Why, bless my soul," he said, "what is Bill a-doin' of?—can you see, sir?"

"Yes," answered Captain Maxwell—"the damned fool's making the running!"

"Confound the boy!" ejaculated Lord Chillingworth, peering more keenly still through his glasses.

"They're all together now," said Captain Maxwell.

"Yes!—no!—yes! The blue jacket wins!" exclaims an enthusiastic voice in the crowd.

A moment more, and the mystery was solved. Wild Peter flew past the stand, Bill tugging energetically at his head, without the slightest effect. As he neared Plumper, the lad's hat fell off, just at his father's feet; who was so astonished and angry, that he never even attempted to pick it up.

It was too plain the horse had bolted, and was making straight for his stables. His gallant rider sat him well, though his breath was nearly gone, and his strength

quite exhausted. A second more, and the horse, lessening his stride, prepared to re-enter his stables. Quick as lightning Bill threw himself off; while Wild Peter, dashing against the wall, slipped up and fell heavily. But the interest of the spectators, unable to spare more than a minute for this incident, was centered on the other horses. They came along in a body, the sound of their hoofs on the dry, hard ground resembling thunder—"Bird in the Bush" holding well back, and going within himself. In the last few strides the remainder were beaten off, and Bird in the Bush, making a rush, such a rush as Wild Peter ought to have made, won in a canter by a length.

A shout of delight arose from his happy backers, as the multitude streamed on to the course; and Captain Maxwell, and the owner and trainer of the unlucky Wild Peter, went to ascertain the extent of the

calamity. When they got up to him they found Bill on his legs, holding the horse by the head, and the two-year-old trembling and shaking, his eye wild and dilated, his whole body covered with foam and sweat. The lad's beautiful bright jacket was torn and muddy, and he himself had his face and hands scratched.

His father's first word was an oath.

"Well, you d——d young scoundrel, what's the meaning of this pretty piece of work? A nice fool you've made of yourself! Well, I am blessed! look at this 'ere oss's cuts."

"I couldn't help it," answered Bill ruefully; "the oss, he pulls like the very devil, and he tuk the bit atween his teeth, and off he goes, and no power on earth could 'ave stopped him; it was sheer temper on his part."

"Temper! pish!" said his father, "never

was a greater lamb! You're a fool, and that's what you are. Take the 'oss in and look to him, and don't let me hear no more o' yer tongue."

Captain Maxwell, in his disgust and anger, stared in blank amazement, and Lord Chillingworth was engrossed in examining the horse's cuts.

"He'll not come out again this week," said he to Plumper.

"I'm afeared not," answered the latter. "It's precious unlucky!"

"It's precious stupid!" broke out the Captain. "Who'd have thought you'd put up a lad like that who has no idea of riding on a crack horse. You're an old fool yourself!"

With that he marched off, leaving Plumper disconsolate. And thus ended Lord Chillingworth's first "good thing."

"Ha!" said young Jenkyns, as he return-

ed after the race to Lady Fanny's side ; " I am afraid you have lost your bet."

" Yes," said she ; " but only think, Mrs. Wilberforce has won fifty pounds on ' Bird in the Bush ! ' "

" Nonsense ! you don't say so ?"

" It's quite true, I assure you ; ask her— she will not deny it."

" But what would she have done had she lost ? I suppose she could not have paid."

" Oh ! she never loses ; she has such lucky advisers. I wish I had," sighed the young lady. " How I should like to be a man, and go down into the ring and bet ; one can do nothing stuck up here, you know, in the stand," she muttered, as she inscribed the lost sum in a dainty little velvet betting-book.

" Oh ! pray do not think of paying that absurd bet," said young Jenkyns, who was spoony enough not to like to see the blank

disappointment on the face of his goddess.

"I assure you it does not count; it does not signify the least in the world."

"What! let me off my bet!" said the young lady, turning sharply, with her cheeks crimson. "Good gracious! Mr. Jenkyns, you surely don't think I *can't* pay? That's not the way *I* bet, I can tell you."

The young man stammered out an apology; and Lady Fanny, without further ceremony, turned her back upon him.

Meanwhile Gertrude and her sister were sitting on a brake looking at the races, and eating luncheon, surrounded by a bevy of young men. It is always the fashion to make love to the young married beauty of the season, and Gertrude's position and loveliness entitled her to hold that name for this year. So there were plenty of youths eager to whisper soft nothings to her, or carry and fetch, in lap-dog fashion, her parasol, her

glasses, or everything she might require; and even older beaux liked to be seen talking and devoted to the fair young Countess. There are many women whom such homage would have intoxicated with pleasure, forgetting that it was but rank and beauty, and not herself, that was worshipped; but Gertrude received it all with a graceful nonchalance and utter impartiality, that nearly drove her adorers to desperation; for, after all, it is not pleasant when a woman takes your attentions as a due and natural consequence, and treats you as if you were as uninteresting an adjunct as her carriage or her poodle.

Gertrude's eyes wandered listlessly, sometimes along the course, as if looking for something; and once she appeared watching the grey dust-coat of Lord Chillingworth, which was displaying itself opposite in the ring; but at these signs of inattention the

swarm of busy young men talked and flirted harder than ever, and she was forced to listen to their vapid platitudes.

Georgina was delighted; the homage her sister treated so carelessly was all good coin to her; she encouraged the desponding adorers, made love to them herself, and told them, in so many words, that if her sister drove them to despair, she herself at least was perfectly willing to console them. Many were the little touching rings and pins and bouquets that were promised and received by Georgina during this week of pleasure. All her lovers paid black mail, which was energetically levied; and for the happiness of being with Gertrude and her sister, the young men had the satisfaction of knowing that they were considerably the poorer. But then what will men not do, in the ardour of love and youth, to please the fair sex?

They had returned from the races, Lady Chillingworth, and Mrs. Fortescue, and all the party, except Lord Chillingworth and Captain Maxwell, who lingered to see the last of the horses, and preferred walking home. Gertrude's head ached with the heat of the sun, and the noise and glare ; and throwing off her bonnet with the impetuosity of a spoilt beauty, she sat down near the window of her bed-room, to breathe the fresh evening air, which came to her balmy with the sweet smell of hay from the meadows. Below her, large fields stretched away into the valley, where a picturesque little village sent curling clouds of blue smoke into the air ; the cows were lowing in the distance, and the thrush warbled in the laurel-trees under her window. The soft breeze cooled her fevered cheek, and as she looked out to the quiet, peaceful landscape, it was hard to realize that but a few mo-

ments before she had been in the midst of the riot of a race-course.

"Ah! there is Georgina," said Gertrude to herself, as she watched her sister pacing the garden, with Sir Ronald at her side. "What an active woman that is! she never seems to want rest, or the quiet of her own thoughts; while I—I am ashamed to think how I long for all those buzzing inane creatures to leave me to myself. I wonder what the reason is? I suppose she has more capacity for enjoyment than I have. I should like to know whether I shall ever get accustomed to this life. I know Sir Ronald despises me. I know that though people envy me, they blame me for my marriage. Ah! God in heaven, thou knowest it was not for the value of the jewels or the money. I thought perhaps—perhaps I might learn to love Chillingworth in time, though my better sense told me I never should. I wonder

what people feel who love their husbands, and are loved by them? I think I could give my life for one I loved," she continued, musingly; "but I never shall know that, so I need not think of it—if only the time were not so dreadfully, so fearfully long! One hears of people who are always working for their bread, and long for rest. I should like that—it might drown thought; anyhow my head feels like to burst. I once tried charity, and ran after the poor, and read good books to them, and gave them soup, and visited the sick; but after a little while the clergyman called upon me to say that I was encouraging all the beggars of the neighbourhood, and I found I had been egregiously imposed upon, and that all their dreadful stories were made up; and I was so disgusted, I never went near the poor again. The worst of it is, we seem all living for no purpose, to no end. Were we intended, I

wonder, to go through life seeing how much nonsense we could talk, and outvying one another in dress and show? And yet it seems to me that is the only true thing, the only aim worth attaining—there seems no other happiness, no other love, no other truth. How I wish my puzzled head felt clearer, and that I knew what to hope and what to seek for! And I suppose one of these days I shall be old—old like the venerable, infirm creatures that one looks upon with awe and astonishment as one's grandmothers Bah! I hope I shall never live to be old. I am sure, if I am bored now, I shall die of *ennui* then. And I should not like to be wrinkled and ugly. Even the attention I receive now I should not get then, and that, God knows, is poor and worthless enough!"

Gertrude rose and walked to her looking-glass. She gave a sorrowful and yet satisfied

nod at her reflection there, and said, half aloud, "I see what it is that attracts people in me, and yet I never feel any counter attraction for them." In the midst of her thoughts, Lord Chillingworth burst in.

"Oh! you are alone, Gertrude—I thought I heard talking as I came in. Did you ever see such a damnable affair as that was to-day?"

"What affair?" asked Gertrude, utterly unconscious what his remark referred to.

"What affair? Why, that absurd accident to Wild Peter. That boy deserves a sound whipping!"

"Ah! I remember now," said his wife; "yes, I do remember—you thought you were to win that race. I hope the poor boy wasn't hurt. I was so sorry he was run away with."

"Oh! bless the boy," said his lordship; "I only thought about the horse; but you

women have such tender hearts, your sympathy always goes to the jockeys. They are a cunning, idle set, and don't deserve any pity."

"Then why do you employ such bad boys?" asked Gertrude.

"Oh!" he laughed, "we don't care much about the morals of our boys, as long as they win races, and don't commit any very egregious offence. Good-bye, I'm going down now."

"What! won't you stay a few minutes?" exclaimed she, rising from her seat; "I have not seen you all day."

"Very sorry; I must go—I must settle some accounts with Maxwell, and he is waiting for me." So saying, he slammed the door, without another word.

Something very like a hasty expression came to Gertrude's lips, but she did not utter it. Always, if ever she and Lord

Chillingworth might have had a little conversation, and perhaps learnt to know each other better, that Captain Maxwell was sure to want her husband's attention about some trivial racing or sporting matter! Gertrude could almost have fancied it was done on purpose, so often had it annoyed and angered her. She was trying hard to take a little interest in Lord Chillingworth's love of sport, and lead him to talk with her of his favourite topics; but in the very middle of a sentence of hers he would start up, and say he must go and see what "that fellow Maxwell" was doing. It was very aggravating to be treated so, and many wives might have resented it bitterly; but Gertrude was very gentle, and nothing short of absolute insult would rouse her to defiance.

CHAPTER III.

ALMOST before Lady Chillingworth had recovered his lordship's sudden departure, there came a knock at her door, and Georgina entered, still attired in the flowing muslin she had worn at the races. Without being pretty, Mrs. Fortescue had the knack of dress, and, with a nice little figure, contrived to make as much show as many a prettier woman. She knew her talent, and spent a great deal of her time in designing and altering her dresses. To-day she considered her costume remarkably becoming, and her first glance, as she entered the room, was towards Gertrude's looking-glass.

“Why do you sit moping up here?” asked

she of her sister. "Sir Ronald was wondering what had become of you. You have no idea how nice and amusing he can be. We have been walking in the garden together, and I think him quite charming."

"Do you?" said Gertrude indifferently. Georgina was in the habit of taking violent likes and dislikes, which were quickly assumed, and as quickly forgotten, so that Gertrude did not trouble herself much about them.

"Yes," answered Georgina; "and I know one thing, which is—that is—he is very fond of you, he confessed as much to me just now."

"What do you mean?" asked Gertrude quickly, a flush of red mantling her cheek.

"Oh! you need not blush like a school-girl. I don't mean anything wrong; but I think he is very much smitten."

"Georgina! how can you talk so?" said Lady Chillingworth with dignity.

"Pray don't put on your Countess's airs," laughed her sister, who thought it a good joke. "For my part, I don't see why you should be offended, because a handsome young man thinks you pretty and fascinating; you ought to be very much flattered—I know I should!"

"Nonsense!" answered her sister. "What did Sir Ronald say?"

"Aha! Miss Curiosity, you want to know, do you? notwithstanding your prudish airs. I have a mind not to tell you!"

"As you please," returned Gertrude, visibly annoyed, and her blushes increasing. "Sir Ronald could have said nothing that concerns me, so I do not care to hear your conversation."

"Well, I will tell you what he said," answered Georgina more seriously. "He said you were the most charming and original creature he had ever seen, and that Chilling-

worth was a very lucky man ; and I think it was rude in him to say it to me," she concluded, "as I was walking with him at the time. And now I am off—it's time to dress."

So saying, she danced away, before Gertrude had time to answer her.

When she was gone, a faint thrill of joy passed through Lady Chillingworth's heart.

"He does not quite despise me, then," she thought, "though I fancied he did ; or he would not have said that to Georgina. Charming ! What a nice expression ! I had so much rather be charming than pretty or handsome—there is a much more endearing sound about the word." And then she fell into a reverie, from which she was aroused by her maid coming to dress her.

The Ascot party spent their evenings in a pleasantly free and easy manner. There was none of the stiff formal circle after dinner, which is so painful both to hostess and

the really musical sat down to the piano, knowing that those who listened cared for it ; and each lady found some adorer whose happiness it was to sit near her, and toy away the time.

Gertrude was passionately fond of music, and her naturally correct taste was well cultivated ; thus it would often come to pass that she and Sir Ronald found themselves at the piano, while Georgina sat flirting near the window, or paced the gravel terrace on to which the long French windows opened, while the rest played whist for high points, or discussed the races of the morrow. Gertrude and Sir Ronald were thus as utterly alone as if they had been in a separate room ; the hubbub of voices, and the notes of the piano, drowned the words they uttered ; and knowing this, they suffered themselves that night to be drawn into an animated conversation. Sir Ronald had

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finished a song—one of his favourite French romances—and gradually their talk had wandered from music to less abstract subjects; and Sir Ronald told Gertrude of his youthful days, and of his travels in Italy, to which he still looked back with all the enthusiasm of a boy's first impressions.

“Ah! those skies are beautiful, Lady Chillingworth,” he said—“so blue, so heavenly, and the air so vivifying, one can fancy the poets writing impassioned love-songs—indeed, one can speak in no other language in such a climate than the soft, passionate Italian. Were you ever at Venice? Ah! no—to be sure you said you had never been farther than Paris. You, with your love of music and the artistic, would enjoy Venice above everything; but then you must go with some one you love *very* much—some very congenial spirit, or—”

Sir Ronald stopped. Lady Chillingworth

moved uneasily, and he saw his mistake—to tell the unloved, loveless wife this, seemed almost like a sarcasm. He hastened to repair his mistake.

“You must persuade Lord Chillingworth to take you there this winter,” he continued. “I am sure he would like the novelty.”

“I don’t think he would care much for pictures or for moonlight nights,” she said, rather bitterly; then added, “My sister-in-law, Mrs. Dormer, went there for her honeymoon, and she has often told me what a divine place it was.”

“I spent the happiest time of my life there,” resumed Sir Ronald—“at least, I thought so then; but I was but a boy, with plenty of enthusiasm. It would not do, I think, to revisit the happy scenes of one’s youth; one would be sure to find them so different—people’s opinions change so extraordinarily. I can fancy a man scarcely

understanding the thoughts he had as a boy."

"I am sure it is a mistake," exclaimed Gertrude, "to represent youth as the time of one's most perfect happiness—how can it be, when you are fettered and tied down by laws and regulations which you cannot possibly appreciate, and only feel deeply the injustice of?"

"Yes," answered Sir Ronald, "I daresay that is very true; but it so depends—some people's childhood is so careless and happy, that no after-life attains its perfection, and the absence of care never *can* be the same in manhood. For my own part, my childhood and boyhood were singularly happy. I was the spoilt child of my mother, who is kindness and goodness itself; and even when I went to school I was better liked, and got on with fewer hindrances than most boys."

Gertrude did not answer; her eyes were

bent upon the ground. Was she thinking of her own loveless childhood, or her worse than loveless womanhood? I know not; but Sir Ronald, who saw her abstraction, said,

“Don’t you think we have had enough music for to-night? What say you to a turn on the terrace? The night is very mild, and I see Mrs. Fortescue has already adopted ‘my suggestion.’”

Gertrude assented. As she passed the whist-playing group, Lord Chillingworth, who was one of them, gave her a playful tap with his fist upon her cheek, which flushed a brilliant crimson at the touch, while he exclaimed triumphantly—

“Look here, Gertrude, I have held four by honours each time. Maxwell, you must write home to your friends!”

Maxwell did not seem to like the allusion, and Gertrude passed on, her cheek still

burning. Was it the touch, or was it a thought of something else? At the window Sir Ronald, who had run for a shawl, met her, and placed it gently round her shoulders. At the little attention she thought how long she might wait before Lord Chillingworth would show such forethought for her comfort, or care about her catching cold; but she said nothing, and swallowing a sigh, stepped out on to the terrace. It was, indeed, as Sir Ronald had said, a very mild night; the stars were shining brightly, and the air was balmy and soft, while the plants and shrubs gave out a delicious fragrance, and a distant nightingale trilled forth his sweet notes. It was a night for lovers and poets to be abroad—a night when you dare not speak except in whispers of love; and these two who stood there silent side by side, were forbidden to speak of love, and must needs discuss the trivial thoughts of

earth. Ah! had one been beside her to whom she could have talked, Gertrude's bursting heart would have overflowed, and perhaps many a later bitter moment have been spared her. At last Sir Ronald spoke lightly.

"This is a night to make love, Lady Chillingworth. How well a serenade would sound in this garden!"

"It would," she said, in an oppressed voice.

"I am afraid you are tired?" he asked, tenderly. "And I have been so foolish as to bring you out!"

"Oh! no, no," she answered, hastily, "I am not tired—at least, not more than usual."

"I am afraid Lord Chillingworth does not take enough care of you," he said, with a touch of reproof in his tone.

"He—I suppose I ought to say he does take enough," she added, trying to laugh.

Sir Ronald whistled a few bars of a song,

and seemed to be watching the moon, which was just rising.

"I forget," he asked, abruptly; "did you say your childhood had been very happy?"

"Oh! no," she said, wonderingly, "I don't think it was."

"Then you have an endless store of happy days before you—you know the saying, 'All's well that ends well.' It does not do to have too bright a beginning."

"No, nor too bright an ending," added Gertrude, sadly.

"*You* must not talk so," he said, drawing her arm into his as they paced the gravel walk. "*You*, the courted and admired, the bride of so short a space!"

Gertrude stopped and said suddenly, looking him in the face,

"Do you think riches and position everything a woman cares for, Sir Ronald? I thought you had a better opinion of the sex!"

“Nobody has a better opinion than I have, Lady Chillingworth. I always say a man is at the bottom of all a woman’s faults; but still, I think a soft couch is better for a sad heart than a bed of stones!”

“Undoubtedly,” she said, as they resumed their walk; “but you therefore think a woman capable of sacrificing everything for money—you think—” her voice faltered—“that—for instance—I have married for riches and position?”

She was looking appealingly at him—her eyes were full of tears.

“I never said so, Lady Chillingworth,” he answered reproachfully, almost harshly; “you put words into my mouth that I never intended to use. I was talking in the abstract, and you have raised my thoughts into personalities.”

His tone was cold, and Lady Chillingworth sighed, but made no answer. They

walked a few paces in silence—all at once she exclaimed,

“I see how it is, you despise me!—you despise me so utterly, that you care not to disclaim it! I have deserved it—see, I bow to my fate.” Her head drooped.

Sir Ronald thought she was going to faint, a sudden fear seized him, and he hastily put his arm round her waist to prevent her falling.

“Thank you,” she said haughtily, disengaging herself from his grasp, “I can stand without support. I am stronger than you think—I can even bear your taunts without flinching. Thank you, Sir Ronald, you have done me good—you have shown me that to the weak it is yet not permitted to falter under the burden. Fear not I shall forget the lesson. And now, where is Georgina?—let us join her.”

She walked calmly forward, and Sir Ro-

naïd was fain to follow, still overcome by his astonishment. Gertrude steadily resisted any further attempts at a *tête-à-tête*. When Sir Ronald approached her with a request for pardon on his countenance, she began to talk vehemently to whoever might be near. Georgina tried in vain to get rid of her sister's unwelcome eyes, in order to pursue her own flirtations. Gertrude would not leave her. The dull youths whose happy lot it was to-night to be talked to by Lady Chillingworth, wondered at her volubility and her feverish manner, and their hearts beat with delight as each thought that at last he had made an impression upon his goddess, and that her stony indifference was now melting beneath his touch. But Sir Ronald knew the key to the mystery—he knew that her brilliant talk was but intended to drown her agitation, and prove to him that she had not meant her previous words; he saw

the struggles of the frightened, wounded bird, and though his heart bled for her, though he would have done all to give her happiness, yet he knew that he was powerless—he knew that he could but sit by and watch her struggles, and hope that their end might be a happy one. He reproached himself for his hardness to her—"If I had not treated her so badly," he thought, "she might have opened out, and I might have found the broken chord, and perhaps set the instrument in tune again; but I have frightened and angered her now, and lost the only chance I may ever have of helping and consoling her.

Thus mused Sir Ronald; in vain he watched for a moment to tell her how bitterly he repented having repulsed her confidences so coldly—to tell her how he felt for and esteemed her, and all that he could say to mend the breach between them; but

Gertrude never spoke to him till she held out her hand, and in a calm, clear voice bade him good night. She looked him in the face so quietly, so sweetly, he could scarce believe she was the agitated woman who had appealed to him so touchingly in the garden. He marvelled at her self-possession, and almost blamed her coldness; but then he did not see her when she reached her room, throw herself down beside the bed, and sob as if her heart would break—he did not know that her aching eyes were never closed all night, and that the morning sun found her still sitting in an attitude of despair, dressed in the crushed gauzy draperies of the previous evening. But he continued to pace the terrace where they had walked together, and smoked his cigar as he looked up at Gertrude's window, and smothered a strange sort of ache that was rising in his breast.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day was as bright and hot as ever. The gentlemen voted the heat unbearable, and drank oceans of claret and seltzer-water, and arrayed themselves in the loosest of brown holland garbs and white felt hats, which it seemed almost impossible to suffer from the heat in ; and the ladies declared they'd much rather stay in the garden and sit under the shelter of the trees than go to the races ; but still, when it came to the point, they all appeared looking as fresh and cool as possible in their coquettish summer costume. Even Gertrude, with her aching eyes and racked head, did not stay behind—perhaps she did not care to be left to her own thoughts.

They were a merry party. Lord Chillingworth, as usual, had walked on in the heat of the broiling sun, to see his dear horses saddled; and Captain Maxwell, like a second Mephistopheles, followed valiantly in his wake. This was the Cup day, and the crowd was even greater than on the preceding one. Human beings were jammed together like oysters in a barrel, and a sea of heads swayed to and fro as the centre of excitement moved first in one place and then in another. Even the worthies of the ring plied their avocation with difficulty, and were fain now and then to stop their stentorian bawling, in order to wipe their faces, or refresh their thirsty throats with a glass of ale. The refreshment stalls were doing a tidy business; and even the half-penny barley-sugar and goodies barrow at the course had pocketed no small amount of coppers.

Lord Chillingworth's mare Sweet Bess was favourite for the Cup ; and he alone of all that mob was sweating and fuming, and elbowing his way about in an irritable state of excitement. As the owner of the " favourite " he naturally attracted great attention. People tried to find out from his countenance whether he was hopeful or not; and some enterprising betters dogged his steps, in order to see if he backed his horse, and who he made his bets with. You might have heard two country fellows saying one to another,

" There goes the Hearl of Chillingworth ; he'll win a precious sight of money to-day ! Ain't he lucky—oh ! my ! Wish he'd give us a bit of all his tin ! " While farther on, a Yorkshire trainer was saying to his " pal , " " ' Ere's the Hearl ! He thinks he's pretty sure to win ; I sees him putting down such a lot in his betting-book, it air a shame now.

for the Hearls to come and win all the races, and take the bread out of our mouths. They've got all the money, they have—that's why they're so lucky, they ain't got no brains—it's all the tin, Bill!"

Bill acquiesced, and made a face of disgust.

But Lord Chillingworth heard none of these comments. He had been seeking for Plumper for the last half hour, who in his turn had been running after his lordship ; but in the crowd and confusion it was a hopeless task, and when one entered an enclosure the other was sure to be just quitting it.

His lordship had now arrived at the saddling place, and, foaming and storming, was indulging his heat and wrath in sundry expletives. The perspiration was running down his face, which was the colour of a ripe plum, and his portly white waistcoat, which

the heat, and not his vanity, had forced his lordship to put on, heaved and swayed with an uneasy motion. When Plumper arrived, as heated and as worried as his master, his excuses were at first received with opprobrium, but the jolly Earl was good-humoured *au fond*, and was soon smoothed down.

"And now, Plumper," he said, "*are* we to win?"

"Why, yes, certainly, my lord," answered Plumper, with a suave smile; "that little haccident of yesterday will not occur again. Sweet Bess is as quiet and well-behaved as Wild Peter is the contrary; besides, she knows her business, she ain't a two-year-old. She'll never shut up, and she always tries!"

"At least, I hope that great idiot Bill is not to ride her."

"Lord bless you, no, my lord; the poor boy is so cut up about it all, his mother ses

he cried hisself to sleep,—no, we got young Hemmings to ride.”

“Ah! that’s right,” said his lordship. “Then I suppose everything is promising. Captain Maxwell is backing the mare; and getting our money on; but he ain’t got more than two to one—they fancy her so. However, that don’t so much signify. I want to win the Cup, it is very handsome, and my father won an Ascot cup, so I should like to do the same.”

“No fear, my lord, we’ll win to-day.”

Young Hemmings was much pleased at the idea of his mount; he had often seen Sweet Bess run, and knew that she was a real game animal, and that her performances had quite entitled her to win the Cup; so he looked forward to the glory of being the man of the day, and triumphing over his comrades in the evening.

As he approached the mare to mount her,

he patted and stroked her head, and she turned towards him with her beautiful, intelligent eyes, and sniffed suspiciously, as if she thought he was coming for evil.

“Wo! my lass!—there’s a fine girl! Wo! wo!”

The mare still sniffed about her, and moved her hind leg as if to kick.

“She ain’t as quiet as she used to was,” remarked young Hemmings; “she looks sulky this morning.”

“Sulky!—she never had no temper in her life. I’ll eat my hat if she isn’t going to come out and win the Cup, and astonish them all. Ain’t you, my beauty?”

The mare licked his hand as Plumper led her out, but turned her head longingly towards her stable. When young Hemmings cantered down to the starting-post, he thought he must have been mistaken about her easy paces and her eager gameness.

She galloped with a dull, thumping motion, her tail swaying to and fro, her head bent, and even in that canter young Hemmings had twice to stick the spurs into her.

“Well, if I ain’t much mistaken,” muttered the jockey to himself, “you’re not fit to win the Cup. Whatever can old Plumper be thinking of!” He looked down at her to reassure himself, and, true enough, her coat was rough and staring, and her eye was dull and glassy. “I be blessed if I can make this out,” said young Hemmings; “I shall have to warm you up a bit, my lass!”

So saying, he stuck the spurs in, and sent her along a cracker. She warmed to her work, and when he reached the starting-post, he began to think it was but the effect of his own fancy. They were off as the flag fell. Young Hemmings, who was famous for getting off well, loosed the mare’s head, and shot in front of the others. They had to go

twice round, and as they passed the stand the first time, young Hemmings heard them give him a cheer, the mare pricked her ears, and sped along. She was going much better, her stride was magnificent, and she could easily stay the pace. As they rounded the curve, and came up the hill again towards the stand, the mare made a stumble and nearly fell, but quickly recovered herself; she lost ground, however, in this little misadventure, and Hemmings fancied he felt her stride shorter, as if she was tiring. He stuck his spurs in, the gallant mare answered to them, and again held her place in the foremost van. But as they passed the stand her jockey was more convinced than ever that she was tiring, and his breath came quickly at the thought. He saved her, he kept her going, but did not distress her, thinking that thus she would still win; but when they faced the hill for the last time,

it was evident that the mare was knocking up. Within the last hundred yards from home, Hemmings got out his whip, and called upon her in vain; the mare panted, but did not quicken her pace. One by one the horses passed her, and when at last the winner came in, Sweet Bess was labouring along, her flanks heaving, and her sides bloody, about fifty yards in the rear. It was a signal defeat. The mob cheered, delighted at the overthrow of the favourite; and young Hemmings, white with rage, cursed and swore like a maniac. When at last he saw Plumper, he roared out,

“You d——d old fool!—how could you put me up to ride a brute like this—she’s only fit to go the knacker’s. Win the cup indeed! I might just as well try upon a donkey.”

Old Plumper retorted and said,

“If you hadn’t ridden her out, she would have won! You galloped her to death.”

"Galloped her to death! why, she hadn't an ounce of go in her when she started—she shut up directly I called upon her!"

"You shut up!" exclaimed Plumper angrily.

Lord Chillingworth's face was distorted with annoyance.

"This is the second trick you've played me," said he to Plumper; "I've a mind to get rid of you altogether——"

"Did the mare feed well last night?" asked Captain Maxwell, who had been examining the unlucky cause of so much annoyance.

"Lor' bless you, sir, she never eat better."

"Did you leave her before she was locked up for the night?"

"Leave her!—no, sir, me and the boy Jack that cleans her, we shut her up, and never a body saw her till I unlocked the door myself this morning."

"I tell you what it is," said Captain Maxwell, oracularly, "it's my belief the mare's been poisoned, and that the boy Jack has been tampered with by some man who has laid against the mare!"

"Poisoned!" echoed Lord Chillingworth and Plumper.

"Yes, that's the truth of the case, I'm sure," said the Captain complacently; "the matter must be investigated."

"Well, I never!" said the trainer, lifting his hands in an adjuration towards the heavens; "well, of all the rum things I ever see, this ere's the rummest! How could the mare a' got poisoned, 'cause you see, my lord, she picked up her grub so well, she did!"

Gertrude and her sister were seated in the stand, and amused themselves by peering through their opera-glasses at the people opposite, who crowded the drags and car-

riages. All at once Lady Chillingworth, who had been thus silently occupied for some minutes, exclaimed to her sister—

“Georgina! do you see that pretty fair woman sitting on a carriage opposite, in a pale green silk, and who seems so animated. I wonder who she is?”

Georgina looked, and for a minute or two could not discover any lady that answered to the description; at last she said,

“Do you mean that woman near the yellow drag, there—Lord Chillingworth is speaking to her now?”

“Yes, yes!” said Gertrude eagerly, “that is the lady I mean!”

Georgina burst into a loud, long fit of laughter, while Lady Chillingworth stared at her, fearing lest she had suddenly become demented.

“Oh! my dear Gertrude,” at last gasped Georgina, bursting forth again into her

laugh, "how very odd you are, to be sure ; you certainly say the funniest things ! Do you really not know who that is ? Well, I must say—fancy your asking who the *lady* was ; no wonder I tried my eyes uselessly for ever so long !"

Georgina's amusement had overpowered her again, and she giggled worse than ever.

Gertrude said, rather indignantly,

"Well, I wish you would at least tell me what the good joke is, and why you laugh in that absurd way—I am sure I said nothing to provoke such mirth !"

"Pray excuse me ; Gertrude, the fact is, I really did not think you were such a little fool. Well, if you really wish to know, that *lady* is Mademoiselle Laure, whom you may have heard of before now, and who, though very pretty, is *not* a lady."

"Well," retorted Gertrude, "it certainly is difficult to discriminate in these days, and

unless one goes the length of putting down every unknown and pretty face as an improper character, I do not see where one is to draw the line between ladies and those who ape their dress and manners."

Gertrude spoke rather bitterly, but Georgina was engrossed in a young admirer, and did not hear the speech. Lady Chillingworth, however, continued looking through her glasses, thanks to which she could easily enough distinguish every feature, and almost every glance of the fair lady in green, whose movements appeared to interest her so much. As Mrs. Fortescue had said, Lord Chillingworth was talking to her; and this, coupled with Mademoiselle Laure's beauty, had first attracted Gertrude's attention. Lord Chillingworth was looking so unusually animated, and was clinging with so much *empressement* to the carriage on which the fair one sat, that it was evident his lordship was par-

ticularly amused. As in general his conversation with ladies was very limited, and he always voted the sex a "bore," this made Gertrude wonder. Had she known the true facts of the case, which were that Lord Chillingworth, bitterly annoyed at the upshot of the last race, and inwardly vowing vengeance on everything and everybody, was strolling down the line near the carriages, when Laure, who knew him before his marriage, and was one of those few favoured ladies whom he had treated to dinners and suppers, as a necessary part of a gentleman's and a bachelor's duty, beckoned to him to speak to her as he passed close to her feet. Not caring much what he did, in his state of general irritation, he answered to the call; and she, badgering, and chaffing, and flattering him, soothed down his annoyance, and made him forget his anger in listening to her talk. When you are much

disturbed in mind, the conversation of a stranger, particularly if she be lively in her manner, and a person whom you need not control yourself with, is more soothing than the company of a friend who, if he does condole with, will probably blame you. Thus Lord Chillingworth listened to his fair acquaintance, utterly unconscious that he was being watched from the opposite stand, and that his prominent white waistcoat and light grey coat afforded an easy point of recognition for the jealous eyes whose pleasure it was to behold his proceedings. Had he been talking to a lady in her rank of life, however much engrossed he might have been, Lady Chillingworth would never have minded it, for she was not of a jealous disposition, and was so little accustomed to her husband's attentions, that she would not have missed them; but to see him smiling and talking, and on familiar terms with a crea-

ture whom her patrician lips scarcely dared to name, was galling to Gertrude's pride, and she felt that the man to whom she had sacrificed her life and her youth ought to repay her better than this.

The fact that such low society was more pleasing to him than that of his wife and her equals, branded him with infamy in the eyes of Gertrude; for like all modest women of gentle blood who have never left their drawing-rooms, she pictured to herself only the vulgarities and coarseness of the *demi-monde*, and imagined the whole thing a slough of despond, out of which any one touching the precincts must naturally emerge polluted and debased. She did not know that men look upon these things in a very different light, as an innocent amusement and permitted practice, at the close of which they return to their sisters and their wives with as calm a gait and as measured language

disturbed in a stranger, particular manner, and a control yourself the company of condole with. Thus Lord Ch. acquaintance, was being war and that his light grey recognition f sure it was t he been tal life, howev been, Lady minded it sition, an husband missed talking

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to himself as if at the remembrance of
past interview.

Gertrude rose feverishly, and said to Mrs.

as if they had never strayed into forbidden ground. Gertrude did not think that "to the pure all things are pure," according to the perverted moral of the day; but she thought that once a man had tolerated vice by his presence and his countenance, he was not far from being as vicious himself; and she was not one of those who think that there is one act of morals and code of honour for men, and another and much stricter one for women! To have been neglected for a fairer, more intellectual woman of society might have been borne with patience by Gertrude, but such a sight as this was only calculated to fill her with disgust and anger. She said nothing to her sister—the latter would not have understood her—for *her* ideas of right and wrong were very different; so Lady Chillingworth swallowed her humiliation (for to her it was a real and grievous one) in silence, and

waited patiently for the end of the Earl's conversation.

Mademoiselle Laure had evidently great attractions, for the Earl made a movement as if he was going, and then a word and a smile from her arrested his steps, and he turned again to resume a more animated conversation than before; she was bending over to talk to him, and his face, lifted towards hers, must have been within an inch of her lips.

The blood sprang to Lady Chillingworth's cheeks in an angry stream as she saw this, and she bit her lips till they bled. And now a shake of the hand, one more look towards her, and Lord Chillingworth had left Mademoiselle Laure, and was pursuing his way slowly back amongst the carriages, smiling to himself as if at the remembrance of the past interview.

Gertrude rose feverishly, and said to Mrs.

Fortescue that it was very hot, and that she was tired, and would like to go home.

Georgina acquiesced, though with no very good grace; and as they reached the bottom of the stairs, escorted by two gentlemen, they met Lord Chillingworth, who was coming up.

"Going so soon," he said; "how quickly you have got tired of it, Gertrude!"

"Yes," said Georgina rather crossly; "I don't know why she is in such a hurry to go home."

Gertrude threw one glance of reproach upon her husband, but he did not perceive it, and continued his way whistling, leaving them to make their exit without him.

The dinner passed as usual. Lord Chillingworth was as unconscious, and plied his coarse mirth, and related sporting anecdotes as usual, while Gertrude sat oppressed and dejected. Not a word of *tête-à-tête* had passed

between them, for the Earl came back late from the races, and went straight to dress for dinner, only appearing when they were all assembled in the drawing-room; and it was not till three in the morning, when even the stalwart Earl had smoked and talked and drunk himself tired, that he entered Gertrude's room, and finding her still up, remarked, as he tumbled into bed, that he was decidedly done up, and wishing her good night, soon indulged in the luxury of a prolonged snore.

This was the termination of Gertrude's anxious day, and a fit wind-up to the overthrow of the Earl's second "good thing."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Madeline recovered the effect of the communication Padre Stefano had made her, she felt as if the earth had been torn away from under her feet. Where was now the stability of honour and good principle she had believed in? What was the use of being good, if those she had thought the best, the holiest of God's creatures were so liable to stumble and to fall. With the knowledge of her mother's shame, Madeline saw shattered all the ambition, all the nurtured visions of her former life. Blighted, dishonoured as she was, how could she ever lift her head again proudly, and face the world as she had done before? She, a burden and a shame to her husband! The

tears that Madeline shed as she knelt, bowed with grief, were perhaps bitterer than any pressed out by repentance, for *then* they may claim to wipe out sin ; but for her, pure as she was, helpless to avert the slightest evil consequence of the blight that had fallen on her—for her they could avail nothing. How Madeline adored Arthur, how she felt that nothing would be too precious for her to give in return for his great generosity, need not be said. And now, in the middle of her distress of mind, in her deep, gloomy despair, what should have been a glory and a ray of divine sunlight, the fact that she was to become a mother, filled her with nothing but dismay. What was the use of bringing another helpless soul into the world, on whom would fall the odium of his mother's dishonour ? Oh ! the thought was too appalling ! “ Would I had never left the tender privacy of my own home !—would I

had died rather than that Arthur should thus have sacrificed himself!—would I could wipe out all the past months, and restore to him liberty, and to me peace of mind!”

Thus the unhappy woman reasoned as she wrung her hands and wept. The intensity of her love humiliated her in her inmost soul; she felt it almost as an insult to Arthur that he should be loved and claimed by such an one as her. I doubt whether the degradation of guilt was ever felt as acutely, as the innocent girl, with the full delicacy and refinement of her sensitive feelings, felt another's shame press her down. Then there suddenly flashed upon her mind the terror lest this was a visitation from Heaven come upon her for her worldliness and her neglect of religious duties; so she ardently confessed herself and unburdened her heart before the Padre Stefano, whose interest it

was to keep alive in her these fanatical and useless fears. She would rise early and attend mass before any of the household were stirring ; she fasted incessantly, and in the long hours of the night, when Arthur slumbered, she would kneel upon the cold floor, pouring forth impassioned prayers that her sins and those of her mother might not be visited upon her husband, or upon the yet unborn babe, whose future lot was dim with horror in her eyes.

Padre Stefano sustained her faith and her courage in the exercise of these pious duties ; he would tell her that the more she fought and struggled, the happier would those be whose destiny and life were dearer to her than her own ; he would tell her of the saints, and of the blessed martyrs, and fire her impulsive nature to emulate their deeds ; and when, after hours passed in impassioned mystical prayer, or in thrills of

divine inspiration, as they seemed to Madeline, the unhappy girl fell into a fainting-fit of exhaustion, the good Father would bathe her forehead, and say, in his most unctuous tones, that her prayers and her strivings were surely accepted in heaven.

Meanwhile, Arthur was perplexed and worried in his own way. The discovery of Madeline's birth had come in a most inopportune moment; he had counted on her beauty and charms of manner to efface any doubt that might have arisen about her race or origin. She looked so completely a lady, that Arthur had thought her name would never be questioned; he had expected that she would conquer for herself a place in society, and instead of damaging, would have bettered his prospects. The fact is, Arthur's position was a false one; he was created to be an amateur artist—to take just so much of the fame and of the strug-

gles of an artist as seemed to him compatible with an easy life, and when the duties and privations became irksome, to resign them for the comfortable ease of a gentleman's existence. To be a real artist requires a thorough renouncement of the world, and contempt of its opinions—a dedication of your life, your time, your efforts to one set of ideas, to the dissemination and culture of one ideal, and to merge the thoughts of self in the grandeur of your profession. This was just what Arthur could not do. Art was secondary to himself and his love of enjoyment, and in taking Madeline for his wife he had contemplated her being a help, and not a hindrance to him in the ranks of society, and he knew his mother sufficiently well to be quite sure that she would not spare Madeline's reputation, and that, thanks to her evil report, his hopes of success would be

irrevocably blasted. He had not sufficient strength of mind to hail this rupture with society as a real boon, and, forsaking all else, to dedicate his life to his art. But even in his highest aspirations after fame and success there was some alloy of worldly feelings. Indeed, now that his art was all he had to depend upon, it had lost much of its charms in his eyes, and he preferred mooning about the streets, and whiling away the hours at his club, to settling down to earnest study-work. Madeline saw his restlessness and dissatisfaction, but did not say a word; for would not that imply that she had a right to find fault, which, in her self-reproach and her humility, she utterly disclaimed?

So things went on as best they could, and Madeline devoted more and more of her time, as she saw less of her husband, to the practice of her religious exercises. Padre

Stefano, in these days, was constantly in and out of the house ; he looked burdened with care and grave with thought, and seemed very busy writing and pursuing inquiries. All these, as he told Arthur, tended to the one object, the proving Madame Scarsi's marriage with Colonel Vesey,—for that he was Madeline's father, the Padre never for a moment doubted. But there were numberless difficulties in the way, all of which the priest set himself to solve. In the first place, Madame Scarsi was obstinately determined not to disclose the name of her seducer; and even had she done so, it is probable that it might only have been a name he was known under to her, and which he adopted to avoid detection. Then, again, knowing the character of the man, and the number of years that had elapsed since the marriage was supposed to have taken place, it seemed hopeless to expect an admission

from Colonel Vesey, or that anything could be proved against him.

But the priest, with a perseverance and ingenuity that were truly admirable, toiled and slaved on in the search after truth, certain that his labours one day would be requited. His first act had been to ascertain all Colonel Vesey's ways and habits, the exact date of his—or, as we must now call him—Lord Mountjoy's trip abroad with Sir Ronald Minton, which he found tallied with the time when Madeline must have been born, and with Madame Scarsi's period of wedded happiness. He then discovered Lord Mountjoy's man of business, and called upon him to make a diplomatic visit, and extract what information he could; but the lawyer was dry and impassable as his own parchments, and to sundry mysterious threats seemed to pay no attention, undergoing the operation of pumping without any visible re-

sult. The Padre left him in despair, and resolved now to try his last card, a personal interview with Lord Mountjoy, in which he hoped to induce him to compromise himself.

One morning, during the hot weather of that Ascot week that the Chillingworths spent so pleasantly, the priest sallied forth; determined that nothing should deter him from entering Lord Mountjoy's own presence. This nobleman, since his wife (Miss Clare's) death, had given up the handsome house and establishment he then possessed, and had taken lodgings in May Fair, in which he could indulge habits congenial to his tastes, much more freely than when surrounded by pomp and splendour. Here no one asked what he did, or where he went; his landlady was satisfied as long as her rent was duly paid, and the foreign-looking valet who waited on his lordship was discretion itself; so that breakfasting in a dressing-gown, irre-

gular hours, dirty habits, and intense smoking, were not only permissible, but encouraged by his surroundings.

On the morning in question it was about half-past twelve as Lord Mountjoy was sitting over his matutinal repast, puffing slowly at a long pipe, and wrapped in the loose folds of his Cashmere dressing-gown. He was perusing his morning paper, and reading the report of the musical performance at the Opera at which he had been present the night before. "Hm! what a lie!" he was muttering to himself, "Mademoiselle Rosalie did not break down in that staccato passage; and for my part I thought Signor Rossi exceedingly out of tune." He threw the paper down crossly on the table, and said, "I think I shall take to writing the critiques of the Opera; they do tell such infernal falsehoods, and they don't know a soprano from a tenor's voice."

He was disturbed in his soliloquy by his valet, who popped in his head and allowed his twinkling black eyes to roll curiously round the room.

"What is it, Jacques?" said Lord Mountjoy, pettishly, for the critique had put him out of humour. "Don't stare about in that silly manner!"

"If you please, milord, there's a gentleman wishes to see you."

"Oh! depend upon it," said Lord Mountjoy, "it's that stupid director come to speak to me about Cécile's *début*. Well, he's been long enough about it, at least."

"I don't think he is come about that, milord, for he is a religious gentleman."

"What do you mean by a religious gentleman?"

"I mean a *saint père*—a priest."

"A priest!—what can he want? I am not troubled by those sort of visits gene-

rally. Well, show him in, Jacques; I am curious to know what he has to say, it will be a pleasing variety."

Jacques withdrew, and in a few moments Padre Stefano was shown in to the hot, dusty tobacco-laden air of his lordship's sitting-room. Lord Mountjoy could be gracious when he chose, and, half rising, he requested the Padre to sit down, at the same time intimating to him to proceed.

"I daresay you are astonished at my visit," said the priest, in his urbane manner; "but I thought it best, in a circumstance of some little difficulty, to address myself to you directly, without the intervention of a third person."

"Certainly, sir, certainly," answered Lord Mountjoy, encouragingly; "I applaud your frankness."

"Well knowing your liberality and greatness of heart," continued the priest, "as ex-

emplified in the patronage and assistance you constantly confer upon deserving artists, I——”

“You want my protection for a *débutante*,” interrupted his host; “a queer advocate she has chosen, I must say.”

“No, my lord, I do not claim either pecuniary assistance or your protection for an artist; but what I seek is this—I seek redress for a crying wrong, I seek justice for the innocent, and peace to a disturbed mind, and this you, who have been the author of the wrong and injustice, though I fully believe unwittingly—this you, I say, will be the last person to refuse.”

“What on earth do you mean?” said Lord Mountjoy testily. “I am guilty of no wrong and no injustice.”

“Did you ever know a woman who went by the name of Madame Scarsi?” asked the priest, quite unmoved, bending his eyes

rally. Well, show him in, Jacques; I am curious to know what he has to say, it will be a pleasing variety."

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“What on earth do you mean?” said Lord Mountjoy testily. “I am guilty of no wrong and no injustice.”

“Did you know a woman who went by the name of Mrs. Montjoy?” asked the Countess, looking at him with her eyes

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“You want my protection for a *débutante*,” interrupted his host; “a queer advocate she has chosen, I must say.”

“No, my lord, I do not claim either pecuniary assistance or your protection for an artist; but what I seek is this—I seek redress for a crying wrong, I seek justice for the innocent, and peace to a disturbed mind, and this you, who have been the author of the wrong and injustice, though I fully believe unwittingly—this you, I say, will be the last person to refuse.”

“What on earth do you mean?” said Lord Mountjoy testily. “I am guilty of no wrong and no injustice.”

“Did you ever know a woman who went by the name of Madame Scarsi?” asked the priest, quite unmoved, bending his eyes

piercingly upon his listener's face. Lord Mountjoy quivered, his glance fell for one moment, and then he answered, calmly and distinctly—

“No, nor can I imagine what you are driving at.”

The priest returned—

“It is useless to attempt to deceive me, Lord Mountjoy, with the semblance of ignorance, which I know you only affect. I am acquainted with the whole truth. I know Madame Scarsi intimately, and am her confessor; and it is on behalf of her daughter, a lovely, fascinating girl of eighteen, that I appeal to you to-day. And when I say her daughter, it is needless to add that she is your daughter also.”

“Did she—did the woman who calls herself Madame Scarsi tell you I was the father of her child?”

“Yes,” answered the priest.

"Then, if she thought so, why did she not come to me?—why did she not claim my assistance, and appeal to me herself? Nonsense!—nonsense! I am not a baby, to be taken in by the first clever impostor; and I tell you the whole story is a tissue of improbable lies."

"I can bring witnesses," began the Padre.

"Indeed! and where are they?" interrupted Lord Mountjoy, fiercely. "Pish! if you wish me to respect your cloth one moment longer, leave the room, or I will make you feel the strength of my arm! Or, stay, you are not worthy of that, my servant shall turn you out!"

He clutched at the bell as he spoke, but the Padre said,

"Your insults will not move me one bit from my purpose; and if you do not wish the whole world to talk of your infamy, you will not cause any unnecessary scandal."

The priest saw that Lord Mountjoy was listening, in spite of his anger, and proceeded further: "If you choose quietly, and without noise, to acknowledge Madeline Scarsi as your legitimate daughter, to which her beauty and charms may well lay claim, her family will not further molest you, and all will be favourably settled. They do not want money, or anything except an acknowledgment of your marriage to her mother, which, as you know, you cannot deny. If you will not accede quietly to these terms, I hereby declare war to the knife between us, and that I and all her friends will spare no measures to humiliate and bring you to our terms!"

"Maniac!" shouted Lord Mountjoy, "leave the room!"

"I am going," answered the Padre; "but, remember, it is war to the knife, and *sans merci*!"

The priest walked slowly to the door, and descended the stairs unmolested, while Lord Mountjoy, in high dudgeon, finished his cold cup of coffee.

Once in the street, Padre Stefano paused to consider what his next step should be ; the batteries he had brought to play upon Lord Mountjoy had failed of their effect, menaces and entreaties had proved of no avail, and now he was again cast upon his resources, without a hope or a clue for the future. But the Padre was not a man to be easily daunted ; he was not an idle child of fortune, who sportively plays with the events and opportunities thrown in his way ; on the contrary, the discipline of the Church had taught him austere patience and perseverance, and hindrances only fired him on, instead of deterring him. Yet, at the same time, his wits were for a moment at a loss—give him a clue, and he would unravel and

follow it out with intense and wonderful ingenuity ; but with no clue all his sagacity was at fault ; so he walked along, with head downcast, deeply meditating. Suddenly he was startled by a clutch laid rudely on his arm. Astonished, he looked up, and beheld an elderly woman, clad in respectable dark-coloured garments, and who seemed in a desperate hurry, for she was so out of breath, she could scarcely speak.

“Softly, softly, my good woman,” said the priest, smoothing his ruffled sleeve—
“what is it you want?”

“Oh ! sir, you are a Catholic priest—yes, I see it by your garb—for the love of Heaven, come with me on an errand of mercy !”

“An errand of mercy ?” said the priest, suspiciously ; “you seem in a great hurry—what do you mean ?”

“Come this way, sir, and I will tell you

as we go ; you cannot refuse—you, a priest of heaven."

"Well, well," said the Padre, following the woman's hasty strides with difficulty ; "only tell me where you are going, and what it is I am to do."

"I am taking you to the hospital," answered the woman, without lessening her speed—"a poor young creature is dying, and wants the assistance of religion ; she is a Catholic, and I went to fetch Father Peter, who lives near, but he was out, and as I was hurrying along to seek another, I met you. Providence threw you in my way, and I trust we may now arrive before it is too late."

"And who is the person, and what is she dying of?"

"I don't know who she is," answered the woman shortly ; "she was brought to the hospital, and therefore has claims to our

care, and it is in the interest of humanity that she may not die (perhaps with her sins unforgiven) that I have fetched you; but come, we must hasten—we may yet be too late!”

The woman relapsed into silence, and the priest asked no more. Soon they arrived at the door of the hospital. At a glance the priest saw its destination. Here unhappy, friendless women brought into the world the children of their sorrow or their shame; here were hidden remorse, tears, sufferings without end—perhaps, also, the purest joys, the greatest acts of resignation and sublime contentment. The hall was hushed and quiet, and the woman, motioning to the priest, bade him follow her up the stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

A LONG a cold bare passage, the wooden flooring of which was wet with recent scouring, the priest and his conductress proceeded. There was no sound, but a damp chill pervaded the air, which made the priest draw his garment tighter round him. Threading these passages with facility, the woman went up two or three stone steps, and finally opened the door of a large, long room. The walls were scrupulously white, the wooden floor as clean, and smelling as damp as that of the passages. There was no furniture in the middle of the apartment; but ranged along the wall were numberless small beds, bare of curtains, and looking cheerless and repelling. In these beds lay

several women, whose faces were as white as the coverlets spread over them. Some expressed intense apathy and indifference, others despair and sullen anger, while, strange contrast, some beamed with the sunny bliss that the knowledge of being a mother makes women experience.

In the furthest corner of the room, shaded by a black screen that hid the bed from the gaze of the other inmates, was a couch surrounded by two or three attendants, and a doctor, who shook his head as he contemplated the ashy paleness and the violet lips of the sufferer who reposed there. There was a murmur running amongst the sick women, and here and there sounds of suppressed laughter, notwithstanding the near presence of death; but as the priest entered, the hum ceased, and he walked slowly down the file of beds, bestowing no glances right or left, while a gaze of wonder followed him.

For a moment the priest, accustomed as he was to scenes of sorrow and despair, could not repress a movement of pity as he beheld the figure of the girl who was thus said to be dying. Her features were so young, the cut and outline of her face so pure, and the expression one of such sublime, heavenly resignation, as the heavy eyelids, with the fringe of dark lashes, fell upon the snowy cheek, and the corners of the mouth drooped with a touching look of pain. Masses of golden brown hair floated over the pillow, and made the dead whiteness of the face more awful still. The crowd withdrew as the priest approached, and he gave one long, earnest look at the dying girl, then in a whisper he asked of the doctor,

“Is there no hope?”

“None!” signed rather than spoke the latter.

The priest knelt down by the bedside,

and in a low musical voice murmured prayers and orisons for her who was thus passing away. One by one the bystanders withdrew ; the minister of consolation was there, what more could they do ?—only the grave, quiet nurse, who seemed to have the special charge of the sick woman, stood on the other side of the bed, gazing silently down, and furtively brushing away a tear, as the words of the priest rose and fell in solemn cadence, like the swell of the organ, or the dreary whistling of the Æolian harp.

The sick woman neither moved nor spoke for some time ; suddenly her eyes unclosed, a faint flutter of life passed over her countenance, and her lips murmured “ mother.” No voice answered ; the priest had stopped his prayer, and was gazing intently at her. With a movement of pain the girl turned her head, and coming to her senses, gave a

shudder, as she said, "Ah! I remember, the horrid hospital!"

She closed her eyes again, as if to shut out the sight, while the priest said in a low, solemn voice,

"My child, make your peace with Heaven before it is too late."

The girl seemed to awake at his voice, and murmured,

"Holy Father, save me! Ah! there is no hope—no peace for me!" she continued in a mournful tone. "I have been very—very wicked!"

"There is always pardon for a repentant sinner," answered the priest; "pray to the Blessed Virgin, and call upon her to intercede."

"Ah! my mother!—my poor mother!" began the girl again, "who will console her if I die? But I am not dying!" she exclaimed vehemently, trying to raise herself

upon her elbow, but sinking back, overcome by weakness. "Ah ! tell me I am not dying—oh ! mercy !—mercy !"

The flush which had come to her cheeks with the effort forsook them, and the ashy paleness covered her face again. It was no use hiding it from her—she was dying ; and yet how hard to take away hope, and with it life, from a young heart ! There is a strange mystery in the parting between life and death—an awful horror in the sight of life and warmth and feeling gradually fading away, and nothing but coldness and silence and inanimateness remaining ; but worse than all is the fierce struggle between youth and the grim destroyer—Death. The agony of the vital faculties seeking to withdraw themselves from his grasp ; while slowly, awfully, but surely, he strides on, and chills his opponent with a hellish embrace.

The priest saw, and his hard and well-

seasoned heart felt for the death-agony of this young girl. Why are the fairest of earth's creatures to be smitten?—why are beauty and life to fade first, while those who might best be spared flourish and grow fat in pompous wickedness, like the green bay-tree of the Bible? This is another mystery, and perhaps its awful warning is the best answer to the reason *why*.

The agonized, imploring expression on the girl's face had again left it with exhaustion; peace returned, and the heavenly innocence of the childish countenance shone out again supreme, covering the features with a halo of divine light.

“And I am dying!” she murmured. “Ah! father, there is one thing—will you give her this?”—she drew with difficulty from under her pillow a small gold cross attached to a ribbon—“tell her her daughter hopes for forgiveness—tell her I die sor-

rowing for all the grief I have caused her—
tell her that it was *he* who made me wicked
—and—oh! my strength fails me—pray,
oh! pray for me, my father!”

“What is your mother’s name, my child?”
asked the priest hurriedly; “tell me before
it be too late.”

“The widow James!” gasped the girl;
“they all know her. Ivy Cottage, Hamp-
stead.”

The last words were almost inaudible;
her voice grew faint, and a shade—a de-
composing shade—passed over her face.
The priest, calm and matter-of-fact, drew
out a pocket-book and made a few notes.
He had scarcely finished before death was
visibly to be seen advancing upon his victim
with rapid strides. The sick girl held out
her hand feebly to the priest, said “Thank
you!” in a low gasp, and closed her eyes,
while one shudder passed over the whole

frame. The priest's last prayers were addressed to a soulless corpse.

A hush reigned in the room—even the idle, careless women were shocked at the girl's sad end, and waited in silence for the Padre to rise from his knees. At last the orisons ceased, the priest reverently closed the dead girl's eyes, and gave a long mournful look at her countenance, beautiful still; then with slow steps he approached the nurse, who had had the chief charge, and who was sobbing loudly, and asked in a calm, business-like way, a few questions regarding the sufferer he had been ministering to.

"Ah! sir, it was a fearful thing," the woman said, "to see her die so young, and so lovely-like. When did she come, you say?—well, it might be about yesterday morning; she came all white and trembling with pain to be admitted. She never spoke:

nor told us nothing about herself, but moaned on 'Mother, dear mother!' just as she did to you at first. The babe was born this morning about four o'clock, and all seemed going well till a few hours ago, when we saw she was gradually sinking, and we sent for you, as she asked for a priest."

"Where is the child?" asked the priest, who had been listening attentively; "is it alive?"

"Lord bless you, sir, yes; but it won't live long, I think—it's a poor, sickly, puny little thing, and——"

"It ought to be baptised," interrupted the priest, sternly; "show it to me."

The woman preceded him into another room, where were several new-born babes, and motherly nurses tending them. One of them was brought to the priest as that of the dead woman. He took it in his arms and peered into its little wizen, red face for

a few moments, then he said, "There is no likeness."

"No, sir," answered the nurse, deferentially dropping a curtsey; "but the mother was a beautiful young woman."

"Bring water," commanded the priest; "I must baptize it without delay."

"What is the name to be, sir?" asked the woman, eagerly.

The priest paused.

"What was the mother's name?"

"I do not know, sir; but on her linen was the name Lucy."

"That will do," said the priest; "I will begin."

And there, in the bleak, bare hospital, surrounded by paid nurses, and in the arms of a perfect stranger, the fatherless and friendless babe was introduced into the bosom of the Church, and received the name of Lucius. When the brief but reverently-

conducted ceremony was over, the priest said,

“This child must go to his grandmother, whose address I have—I will take it to her.”

“Oh! not to-day, sir,” pleaded the nurse; “not to-day—it is not fit. Look what a poor little thing it is!”

It was indeed a wretched, squalling little bundle of clothes, with a scarlet face; and the priest himself was staggered for a moment by the truth of the remark.

“Well, then, to-morrow,” he said; “I will call again, and arrangements must be made for the decent burial of the mother.”

“She will receive a pauper funeral, sir, if none of her relations come forward.”

“Well, well, I will see,” said the Padre; “probably her mother is in a respectable position, and will arrange this herself.”

After a few more remarks the priest departed, the nurse showing him to the door with many grateful curtsies. As Padre Ste-

fano slowly left the hospital, the current of his thoughts flowed in a very different channel from what they had done a few hours before; but a short time ago he had been bending all his energies to track a mystery and discover a secret, which seemed to baffle all his efforts. He had been eagerly hunting out a clue which absorbed all his ingenuity and all his attention, while other matters seemed common-place and unimportant; now the revulsion had set in, and, in spite of himself, the heartrending death-bed scene at which he had been assisting had softened and interested him in an episode which seemed to have no reference to the subject nearest his heart. What blind mortals we are, never knowing when a thing is within our grasp, never dreaming of what is yet self-evident, and when we do stretch out our hand, only seizing the phantom of what is already flown. The priest had not

a suspicion that now, at last, the object of his search was found, and that a seeming chance had thrown him the greatest prize he could hope to win. Ah ! no, we are certainly, the cleverest and sharpest of us, not omniscient, and perhaps it is better for us, in our blind, obstinate folly, that we are not. The priest walked quietly on, meditating on what he had seen, and thinking, with a sigh, that the responsibility he had just undertaken would prevent for a few days any further progress in his scheme to discover Madeline's birth and parentage. All that was sentimental and pathetic was thoroughly remote from the Padre's constitution ; no man had learnt the lessons of the Church more completely than he had, merging the personal in the impersonal, the unit in the multitude. The will and advantage of the Church were the only things to be considered and advanced ; what was the individual love or interest that

it should be weighed in the balance? All this the Padre knew and practised, and death and suffering were not regarded, so long as they were necessary accessories; but yet the sad death of this young girl, the evident mystery and sacrifice of her young life, the floating hair, the wild, imploring eyes, the violet hue of death upon the pallid quivering lips—all this haunted the stern preacher of self-abnegation, and made him, spite of himself, pause and ponder.

“What is there worth living for in this life, since death comes equally to the young and to the old, to the strong and to the weak—since beauty availeth nothing, and knowledge cannot save? Is all, then, vanity—utter, hopeless vanity? And what is the key to this suffering, writhing humanity?—to what end were we formed, and is the one cry of anguish that all creation sends up daily and hourly, the only object of exist-

ence? And is God, then, a God of vengeance and cruelty—and is the heart-wrung woe and suffering of his moaning creatures a song of joy and happiness to him?

Such like thoughts passed through the priest's mind, but with the iron strength of will which the exercises and self-denial of his creed cannot but foster, he put them away from him like visions of the tempter, and repeated to himself, lest he might forget it, that the Church was the only true rock of salvation, and that what did not tend to her glory or honour was only fit to be smothered and trampled down under the wheel of suffering and remorse.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE, Madeline's life was shaping itself, as all our lives must. We may seek to arrest the passing hour, or heedlessly live in the present, but time will pass on, bearing with it our daily hopes and joys, and silently, but surely, registering our broken vows, our gradual decay, and evanescent promises. We may think we stand still, and congratulate ourselves on no change either in our persons or our minds, but the change is there, and if imperceptible to ourselves, still there it is indelibly engraved. The wheel of time revolves in its slow, measured cadence, and woe to those who find themselves beneath it!—they will be crushed and mangled, and yet remorse-

less Time goes on and on, unheeding calmly.

Madeline's present thoughts were no longer the thoughts of the simple Italian maiden by the shores of the Adriatic—Madeline's life was not as she had dreamt and planned it—Madeline's happiness, even, had a touch of bitter-sweet in it, which, perhaps, made her prize it dearer, though the dregs of the cup were acrid to the taste. If we could only retain our innocence and our unconsciousness!—but, alas! we cannot live a day, an hour, without learning some new truth, without losing some fond illusion; and the most unconcerned—he, even, who never thinks—must needs acknowledge this. They say that growth is beauty, and that progress and development are necessary to the human life. It may be so, but I must confess the sight of laughing, unconscious childhood gladdens my heart more than the saddened look in the eyes of the matron, or

the silvered hair on the brow of serene old age. I am not sure but I prefer the innocent, instinctive forthwelling love of the young girl to the subdued passion of the woman who has passed through the refining furnace, the promise of things to come to the ripe fruition, the waving green of hope of the young corn to the golden beauties of the harvest crop that must now fall under the sickle of the reaper. But be that as it may, we *cannot* stand still ; we must be always striving on and on, upward or downward, as the case may be, but driven remorselessly on, without rest or respite, till we achieve the goal of life.

Madeline was working out her life ; she was striving on in a perpetual war and conflict with herself, the result of the knowledge Padre Stefano had revealed to her. Her love for her husband burnt with as pure and fervent a flame as ever ; but mixed with

it was a shadow of fear, a tremor as if she had stretched out her hand and seized forbidden fruit, and yet it did not seem to her more delicious, but less so. Each caress of her husband, each breath of his lips, each touch of his hand, filled her with a greater rapture; but in the next moment she would feel as if she were an interloper—as if for her, the disgraced, the nameless one, such sweets were too high, too unattainable.

The light in her eyes no longer shone so brilliantly, the flow of impassioned language was arrested on her lips, as by some unseen power—a dim shadow pressed upon her, and obscured her thoughts, and damped her spirits. The perfect communion of love and sympathy which had existed between her and Arthur, unconsciously to both, was loosened; the happy hours of talk passed in his painting-room, while his rapid brush passed over the canvas, were now few and far between; the colours dried upon the

palette; the canvas was besmeared with dust, and the half-finished portrait smiled grimly from the easel, which had been put aside, as if in a moment of disgust.

Arthur was generally out of the house; but where he went, or how the long hours were spent, Madeline never knew. She would have liked to ask, but a sense of shame kept her back; and when her husband returned, he was generally sullen and morose, and retired to rest directly he had smoked a pipe in silence. This life to the impulsive Italian girl was perfectly intolerable. Accustomed to light, and life, and liberty, she felt oppressed by the pent-up air of London, the smoke and murky fog. The want of companionship—for she knew no one in the vast great town—increased her sense of desolation. The heart-sick longing for a walk by the sea shore, or under the olive and orange-trees; for a breath from the ocean, perfumed and balmy; for the liquid melody

of her native language,—used to overpower her sometimes, till she felt as if she could run away from all the ties that bound her. Then in a moment her love for Arthur re-asserted itself, and the impulse was condemned and expiated by double penance, and attention to the most trivial details of the household.

The summer was far advanced, nay, well-nigh gone, when one day Madeline stood beside her flowers, which she always watered and tended carefully herself, gazing wistfully out into the murky, dim back-yard, which formed all her vista. The canary suspended above her head was pouring forth a joyous song, so loud and shrill, that it might well awaken a sleeper from her drowsiness; but Madeline's slender white fingers toyed amongst the brilliant green of her tropical plants, while her thoughts were evidently elsewhere.

So absorbed was she, that the door opened quietly, but she did not hear it. Arthur (for it was he) came close beside her, and putting his arm round her waist, drew her gently toward him. A faint glow overspread her countenance as her large, dark, fawn-like eyes looked lovingly at him, and he said tenderly,

“My poor white lily, you look as fragile as your namesake there—I am afraid I have neglected you, my darling; you know me too well to fear that it is for anyone else; but I have been worried and disturbed in my mind. What think you of change of scene?—it would do us both good.”

Madeline looked inquiringly at him, and he answered bitterly,

“Ah! you are thinking that a younger son, married like me, has no business to think of pleasure or relaxation, or anything but work, work. If you knew, Madeline,

how sick I am of the constant exhortations of my friends to 'exert myself, not to be idle, there's a good fellow,' and all that trash, advice which it is so easy to give, and so difficult to follow. I do believe, Madeline, there is no creature on earth so miserable as the penniless younger son of an aristocratic house. He has never been taught to work, and he doesn't know how; he hasn't the learning or the brains of his agent or his bailiff—how should he? He received a gentleman's education, which consists in knowing how to starve gracefully. He would like to enjoy life as he sees his brother and all those about him, but he can't, because he hasn't got the means, and he must keep up his position; and the only chance I can see for the poor fellow is to get into a marching regiment ordered to India, and be shot by a nigger; or die, forsaken and alone, of jungle fever in the swamps!"

"Oh! Arthur," said Madeline, reproachfully, "it is surely not as bad as that? Why, your pictures sell wonderfully well; and I thought you were so fond of painting."

"So I used to be," he returned, putting his hand wearily to his brow; "but somehow or other I have no energy at this moment; and these fellows in my own set chaff me about working like a galley-slave; and the real artists despise me, because they think I am not one of the genuine sort. Curse it! Madeline, I feel as if I should like to cut my throat when I think what a useless log I am, and you, my pretty darling, dependent on me!"

"Oh! do not say that. You know I would willingly work myself if I only knew how; and, after all, if we two are happy together, what does the rest of the world signify?—let them talk, we can suffice to one another."

Madeline was kneeling before him as he sat on the sofa, and his right hand was straying, with the old familiar gesture, amongst the luxurious masses of her hair, while her two small hands eagerly clasped the one he had disengaged. She looked very pretty thus in her soft white morning-dress, her slight figure bending and swaying with easy grace. Arthur glanced mournfully at her rich Italian beauty, and said in a voice that trembled slightly with his efforts to make it mocking, " But, my dear Madeline, we can't shut ourselves up in our own house, and never see anyone except our two selves—that sounds all very well in a novel, but in real life we must have something different ; and it riles me to feel that my position can never be better, but, on the contrary, far worse, when we have a parcel of children, all wanting money and education. I begin to think I was a fool to marry ; though I do believe

you are the best little wife in the world."

Madeline winced; she could not help it, this quiet, matter-of-fact speech was so different from her bright day-dreams, her impassioned thoughts of self-sacrifice and eternal love; but probably this was the coldness of Englishmen, that she had often heard of—probably it was not meant. Arthur seemed quite unconscious of the effect of his speech, for he went on—

"We have strayed a long way from our subject. What I came to say, and what brought me home so early is, that Gertrude and Lord Chillingworth are going to the country next week, and they want us to come; she will be such a nice companion for you, and I can sketch in the woods—there is lovely scenery about Chillingworth Castle. Besides, I am sick to death of London, and you look pale, and so I think we had better settle it."

Madeline did not much care at that moment what part of the world she went to, and felt, like Arthur, that it would be a relief to leave the hot, dusty town, for the pleasant shades of woods and fields. So it was soon settled, and once become a certainty, it looked more bright a prospect to Madeline's faded eyes.

Meanwhile the summer had fled wearily enough to the rich and fêted Lady Chillingworth; praises and homage palled upon her sated ear, the sparkle of jewels and the shine of silks and satins failed to enliven her, the noise and pageantry had lost their novelty, and with it their charm, and she caught herself wondering whether the price she had paid for all these gew-gaws was not an exorbitant one. With a perseverance worthy of a better cause, she had plunged headlong into all the excitements and distractions possible; she had sought satisfaction and en-

joyment, and had found blank dulness and vapid *ennui*. It is only those who have been in so-called Elysium who know how many of the diamonds are sham, how much of the silver is tinsel, and how bitter the dregs of the bright liquid they quaff incessantly! Wherever Gertrude went, a shadow followed; whatever she did, a spectre seemed to mock and glare at her, and a voice murmured in her ear, "This is what you sold yourself for!" No wonder the light in her eye was wild and fitful, no wonder the colour on her cheek was hectic, and jealous matrons whispered amongst themselves that the great beauty wore rouge, and really was not half so good-looking as people said. An aching heart is a heavy burden to carry, and even lacing the corsage with diamonds does not always suppress the beating of the wayward creature. Gertrude danced, and rode, and drove, and wore the loveliest dresses, and

the most becoming parures, and gave fêtes which were the talk of the town, and from which Lord Chillingworth always absented himself, generally going down to the country to look at his horses, or spend the day with his devoted follower Captain Maxwell. But she was not sorry when, at last, the season came to an end, and people talked of a flight to German watering-places, or Scotch country houses, where flirtations could be quietly continued under the friendly protection of croquet, or picnics, or walks on the moors, where the vigilance of chaperons might be relaxed, and a few rich eldest sons ran the chance of being netted and secured; while keen sportsmen looked forward to the bracing air and invigorating exercise of grouse-shooting. And suddenly every one found London hot and intolerable; only the few unlucky mothers and daughters who had made an effort "for

the season," and given dinners they could not afford, and dressed in a style which six months' economy would not compensate for, sighed as they thought there was one more chance gone, and retired to the country to pinch and screw and live in seclusion and starvation, till the routine of next year came round again.'

Lady Chillingworth had never yet been home to the ancient Castle that had for long centuries belonged to the Chillingworths, and had seen many generations grow up and decay beneath the shade of its trees. Lord Chillingworth was the last of his race ; no brother or nephew was there to succeed him, and one dread of his had always been that the ancient noble name might become extinct ; and in bringing home a fair young wife, this thought was perhaps as prominent in his mind as any ideas of love or wedded happiness. The one redeeming trait about the

Earl's commonplace, practical nature was an intense veneration for all the old usages and customs that had existed for years in his native place, and he would as soon remove an article of furniture, or cut down an old tree in the park, as have committed a heinous sacrilege. Such as things were, such must they remain, was his maxim; and if Gertrude flattered herself that she was mistress, and could change and transform things at her pleasure, she was much mistaken. In the modern London house she might hang rose-coloured curtains, and put brackets and china all over the walls, and have the queerest little useless chairs and tables scattered about, which impeded your progress, and got between your legs, and somehow were always too rickety to put anything upon; but at Chillingworth Castle the furniture was grave and stately, and old-fashioned, as became the character

of the place, and woe-betide him who had endeavoured to introduce modern ideas or Druce's upholstery! Lord Chillingworth would have speedily turned him out, and called him a heretic and an innovator in much less measured and classical terms. *In* the house you might perhaps have wished for more light and brightness, for the oak galleries were dark, and the heavy mul-lioned latticed windows let in more draught than sunshine; but I defy the most carping critic suffering under an indigestion from pâté de fôie gras and dry champagne, to have found fault with the beautiful wide-spreading park, with its aged oak and elmi trees, and its undulating masses of fern and underwood, its shady quiet pools into which the overhanging branches dipped their heads, and where the deer came to drink and nod their waving antlers over the brownish glossy water; or the distant purple hills,

which rose dim in the morning haze, and on which the sun was wont to set in rosy light so lovingly ; or the brown moorlands, from which the grouse rose with whirring noise, and where the silent mountain spring trickled forth its silvery rill ; or the solemn woods of oak and beech, interspersed with princely birch, where the boughs swayed with each murmur of the wind, the wild pigeons cooed, and the pheasants called to their mates, unconscious of the presence or the enmity of man.

It was indeed a princely domain, and the vast extent and variety of the sports made it a favourable residence with all the Earls of Chillingworth, who had generally been distinguished by their hearty constitutions and love of field sports. No doubt those parks had often been tenanted by gaily-dressed cavaliers issuing forth with horn and hound on hunting or hawking expedi-

tions ; often may the woods have echoed to the groans of the dying stag or wild boar, or the joyous whoops of successful hunters ; while fair dames sat in the vaulted banquetting hall, and wove garments and tapestry amongst their maidens, or plucked roses in the gardens, and fine herbs, to make the distillery and perfumes which it was their pride to produce with their own white hands. But now times were changed, and it was a different race and different doings which the old place would be a witness to.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE rooks were cawing hoarsely as they collected in wavy columns, and spread themselves out in widening circles over the tops of the tall trees, where they were about to alight; the sun was setting in a warm glow, and the myriads of little insects which the heat of the day had brought out were buzzing merrily around, as a group of figures strolled in the old-fashioned but deliciously shaded gardens of Chillingworth Castle. The scent of the roses and jessamine pervaded the air, and the dark box hedges, which had been wont to shelter cavaliers and dames in days gone by, brought out the rich colouring of the flower-beds, in which bright patches of

geraniums, and yellow calceolarias, and blue lobelias spread themselves luxuriously into full relief.

Lady Chillingworth, in a white dress and broad-brimmed straw hat, which gave her the look of a shepherdess on china, leaned against the marble balustrade which bordered the broad steps that led up to the terrace above; and at her side, in deep and earnest conversation, stood Sir Ronald Minton, as handsome and as assiduous as ever. Throughout the London season he had been much with her, always at her side in ball, opera, or concert—always ready to sing or play, or talk, or be silent, which is not the least charm in a companion, according as Gertrude's mood was grave or gay, sentimental or serious. Insensibly she had accustomed herself to his pleasant society, and felt him a help and a necessity in her existence. The world, so prompt to kind

suspicious, set him down as the favoured lover, and interpreted the amiable terms of friendship into meanings far more dark and dangerous. Worldly-wise women shook their heads, and shrugged their shoulders, and affected to pity Lord Chillingworth, while they loudly asserted that she had really begun a little too soon. And envious young married women, who had sought vainly to entangle the handsome Adonis in their own chains, declared that he was infatuated, and that as to Gertrude's beauty or charms, they never could, and never did, see them.

But the victims of these amiable disquisitions were harmlessly unconscious, and tasted their happiness as if there were no hereafter, no envious tongues to mar and spoil, and cherish with loving hands the canker that will cause the fruit to rot and fall to dust. Sir Ronald truly had been

twitted by his friends about his Quixotic devotion to the fair young Countess ; but a few decisive words, and a fierce gleam from his deep blue eye, had showed them he was not to be trifled with, and the most determined jester dared not risk his jibes when he remembered the strength of the powerful arm and Herculean muscles that existed beneath the delicate patrician exterior. So Sir Ronald remained unmolested, and spent his time as seemed best in his own eyes. It was but natural that when the Chillingworths left town, Sir Ronald should be asked to accompany them ; and he, nothing loth, gave up a fishing-trip to Norway, that he might go with them. He did not reason upon whether it was advisable, upon the old adage of playing with edged tools, nor did he pause to consider with what danger or sorrow this constant companionship might be fraught to Gertrude. A spoilt child of for-

tune, free and joyous as the winds, he had followed his own desires through life, enjoying, tasting, and fluttering off when satiated. In the true spirit of the butterfly, though harmless as itself, he would not for worlds have wronged the humblest creature ; but self-indulgence, even in a fine generous nature, unconsciously blunts the nobler feelings, until they are roused by some stern convulsion again into action. He did not say, as a cold-blooded profligate might have said, " I love Gertrude, and I will make her reciprocate my love, be the cost what it may." No deep-laid schemes were his to entrap a guileless, innocent heart—simply she fell in his way, and he, prompt to obey each dictate of his artistic, refined nature, admired, and, in due time, loved her. He never confessed it even to himself, but the air was poison unless her breath fanned it ; life was dreary unless her eyes smiled upon

him ; and the sound of her voice was music in his ear. I do not say that such a feeling is love in its highest form—it is more the love of the senses than of the intellect ; but not the grovelling, coarse sensuality of the libertine, rather the craving of the artist for the creation of his dreams, the worship of the beautiful, whether in body or in spirit. Does anyone suppose that Laura was endowed with all the graces and charms Petrarch invested her with in his rich poetic fancy ; nay, more, is not her existence even denied?—was not Stella a common-place woman, endowed with passions and jealousies, as well as all her sisters ? The worship of the beautiful must necessarily always be the worship of the ideal ; for where can we find perfection upon earth ? And thus each one of us dresses up an image of our fancy, and clothes it in radiant, impossible hues ; and poets write their

sonnets and their odes, to mistresses endued with heavenly attributes, and are much astonished when the idol set up, one day falls from its pedestal, and follows in the world's footsteps. *Then*, the inconstancy of women is upbraided, the sex is accused of falseness and fickleness; while men themselves are to blame for expecting divinity where they find only human frailty. Sir Ronald was a poet at heart; he had known none of the hardening, chastening influences of sorrow or privation—even passion had been but the pleasing variety in a life of enjoyment; his nature loved light and sunshine, as the convolvulus and the jessamine raise their tender petals to the warmth that bids them live. He shrank from misery and guilt, and from the contemplation of sin and suffering, as he would from a noisome reptile; and his life had been so serene, that almost the knowledge of it had been kept from

him; or if he did comprehend that there were some existences so dark, so loathsome, that death would be a mercy in comparison—some nooks and haunts of humanity where not a ray of light, not a hope or joy ever entered—some burdens so heavy to bear, that the sufferers bent and staggered in the dusty highways, and shed tears of blood and agony,—all this seemed so far off, so distant, that it was as removed from his existence as the unchanging moon and stars from this busy, mocking, weary world.

If every one of us were so impressed with the stern reality and work-a-day necessity of this life—if imagination, with its richly-coloured phantasies, its wealth of love and confidence were banished, to give place to practical ideas and sober common-sense, there might be fewer foolish people, but there would be no poets, no artists. It is only the something which lifts them out of the grinding toil and

drudgery of daily life, the divine spark which keeps their souls from grovelling, and their hearts from drying up—it is only the being *in* the world, and not *of* the world, the dreamy, unpractical temperament, that keeps them what they are, and makes them minister to our pleasures, and find keen food for our satiated palates, and bring tears into our eyes, and softer feelings into our worn-out aged bosoms. Poets are eternally young, and eternally sing of spring. How can we blame them, then, if in the ways of the world of which they are not cognisant, they sometimes stumble and fall, or cavil because they do not more resemble ourselves? As well might we expect the gaudy, glorious bird of paradise, or the golden-winged oriole, which flutter and toy amongst the tropical flowers, and are useless, and lovely to the sight, but last only a day, and are the joy of an hour, to

resemble the dark, active, plain house-sparrow, that twits and chirps, and picks up a hard livelihood on the roofs of our houses, and lives its poor life through many a weary year, as to hope that the short-lived, passion-laden existence of the poet, will be ever akin to the money-getting, careful, joyless life of the working men, the social bees of our commonwealth.

Sir Ronald was even now saying to Gertrude, in his low, earnest tones—

“How glad I am, Lady Chillingworth, that you persuaded me to come to the country! What a relief to the eye the pure bright green of the trees is, after the dazzle and glare of heated ball-rooms, and the perpetual phantasmagoria of Hyde Park or Piccadilly! Truly, I believe we should be better and wiser people if we lived more under the shelter of our own fig-trees, as the patriarchs of old, and did not try and

see how much life and individuality we could stifle in the heat and crush of cities."

"And yet to me there is always a silent sadness about the country," answered his listener, dreamily; "there is such a vastness about the outstretching fields and plains—such a loneliness in the large woods—one seems so forsaken, as if mankind were nothing in the face of nature."

"But," returned Sir Ronald, "what feeling does this bright garden, for instance, give you? Here you *cannot* feel alone."

"Not, perhaps, on a bright sunny day like this; but sometimes—oh! yes, I could find this pent-up enclosure oppressive—this formality even of brightness dull and wearisome."

"I suppose all things take their impress from our frame of thought," said he, lightly, "and we have actually persuaded ourselves into a misanthropical state of sadness. Here

comes your brother and Mrs. Dormer ; we must make them enliven us. What think you ?" he added, turning to Madeline—" does the sight of all this beauty make you sad, and do you pant for the smoky chimneys and murky atmosphere of London ?"

" God forbid !" answered Madeline, quickly ; " I love nature, and solitude in a crowd is what *I* dread most."

" *I* hate the company of my own thoughts," said Gertrude, abruptly and bitterly ; then, catching herself up, she added—" at least, when I am in a bad temper."

Her listeners looked at one another ; perhaps an inkling of the feeling which had prompted this speech flashed upon one, at least, of them, but Lady Chillingworth turned up the steps with her proud, stately gait, and the subject dropped.

The little party assembled at Chilling-

worth were light-hearted enough. Besides the Dormers and Sir Ronald, there was only Captain Maxwell, who was mainly useful to play whist in the evenings, and occupy Lord Chillingworth all day in the kennels and stables; and to tramp out shooting from dawn till dark, never tired or weary, and always ready to enter on never-ending discussions about this or that horse, their age, merits, or performances; and a neighbouring squire, rather musical, and exceedingly shy, who fell a victim on the first evening to Madeline's brilliant eyes, and used to sit looking at her in silent ecstatic rapture, which, of course, was the cause of exceeding great amusement to everyone else.

There was not a single grain of sentimentality or romance about Captain Maxwell, and his matter-of-fact remarks and answers were a complete set-off to the half-artistic,

half-speculative disquisitions Sir Ronald sometimes gave vent to. One saw life with the meditative eyes of a philosopher, tasting keenly all the joys of the intellect and senses, and gilding each hour with passing pleasures, evanescent, and yet ever bright; the other turned not from his straight onward path, to work his own way to money and to fortune, only casting a glance of contempt to those who rambled aside in search of the roses and flowers of life; *he* cast them away—they were no use to him! No man gave better dinners than Lord Chillingworth; he had always had a French *chef*, and though coarse in his tastes, none knew better than he the value of a good dinner—not only an expensive, but a really well-cooked dinner—how it promotes digestion, and strengthens the nerves, and creates good spirits, and brings about you pleasant company. So the party at Chillingworth generally grew even

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more cordial over the evening meal, and freely avowed their likes and tastes, for the benefit of the rest of the company.

“What excellent old port this is!” remarked Captain Maxwell to his host, as they sat at the cosy round table, brilliant with lights, and china, and the choicest fruits of the garden.

“Yes, it’s some my father put into the cellar—real 1820; those old fellows knew the value of good liquor!” answered the Earl, smacking his lips. “You’re a good judge, Maxwell, and worthy to drink it. Now-a-days all the young men like washy, sweet champagne, and Badminton, and all that sort of weak decoction. Depraved taste, my good sir; never knew a real good fellow who couldn’t drink his bottle of port a day; it’s the only wine for men, the other may do very well for boys and women!”

“Don’t you like Sauterne and the Rhine

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wines?" asked Sir Ronald. "I think nothing ever tasted to me so delicious as some old Steinberger I once drank on the Rhine with a German Count, who invited me to his château. I can remember now, sitting after dinner, on a sultry July night, looking out over the silvery Rhine, on which the moonshine glistened, and hearing the boats full of students glide by, with the music of the beautiful German Volkslieder they sang rising and falling on the stillness. I have liked Rhine wines ever since that night!"

"Very pleasant, I daresay," laughed Lord Chillingworth, sarcastically; "but deucedly rheumatic it sounds. I'd rather have been dispensed from drinking vinegar on the banks of a river by moonlight. The indigestion and shivering next morning could hardly have been compensated for by the knowledge that it was very romantic!"

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"For my part," resumed Captain Maxwell, "I think one can't enjoy wine except in a warm, snug dining-room, and away from the ladies; one can't make pretty speeches and taste the flavour of claret at the same time!"

"It's rather lucky the ladies are not here to hear you," said Sir Ronald with a sneer.

"Don't care if they were," answered the other; "ladies are all very well in their proper places, and I suppose some men can't get on at all without them; but women and wine are to me utterly ill-matched, about as if you were to put a cart-mare and the Flying Dutchman in harness together. Solomon was no man of taste if he coupled them together."

"I suppose you would give the precedence to the wine?" added Sir Ronald with a smile.

"Certainly; far more likely to keep, and

will never turn sour, with proper attention."

Lord Chillingworth laughed and shouted,

"Hear! hear! Well answered, Maxwell. I believe Minton is like Don Quixote of old—he roams all over the world in search of a Dulcinea to pass the rest of his life with. Take some olives, Minton—they improve the wine, though you *do* only care for hock and seltzer-water."

CHAPTER IX.

PADRE STEFANO was not a man, when he had once undertaken anything, to stop midway ; and though he was rather disgusted at having the care of the helpless baby cast upon him, yet he never for one moment thought of delegating the charge to any one else. He had agreed to find out its grandmother and take it there ; he had promised this to the dying woman, and he intended to keep his word, for he never broke his promise unless there were some object to be attained thereby, and *then* he had no scruples ; but in the present instance he saw nothing to be gained by a breach of faith, and the next day found him hurrying again in the direction of the hospi-

tal. The same motherly woman, clad in a grey stuff gown, with a clean white cap and apron, opened the door to him; and, in answer to his inquiries, said that the child was well, and would be ready for him to take in a few minutes; meanwhile, would he like to look at its dead mother, who was lying in a separate room.

The priest assented, and was led into a small apartment, shaded and apart from the noise and bustle of the hospital. There, on a snow-white bed, reposed the corpse of the dead girl. The hot July sunshine streamed in at the open window, scarce kept out by the green blinds which were carefully drawn down; the scent of summer flowers came up from the garden below, while in deathlike stillness the fair form lay as if in sleep, smiling sweetly. They had tended her carefully, as if the vulgar hired nurses, accustomed to such horror-full, such

heart-sickening sights, had felt a pity for her youth and loveliness. They had gently combed out the damp flowing tresses, and laid them round her like a crown of glory ; they had stretched her tender limbs, and clothed her in a pure white garment ; they had clasped the ivory hands upon her bosom, and had strewed her with flowers, sweet-scented white lilies and roses, the emblem of purity and innocence, which the marble face, with its pure angelic expression and delicately-cut features, might well have passed as the emblem of, but which, alas ! in the world's eyes, would have found no mercy and no succour. Well was it perhaps for her that she had been thus early taken from the turmoil of a life which to her must have been a never-ending bitterness ; well was it that she died surrounded by pitying, ignorant eyes, who would neither judge nor condemn her, who, in their harsh, uncompromising justice, would not crush

and trample her down, and leave the bleeding heart to its last sorrowful agony! No, God in His mercy had forgiven her, and taken her to His bosom, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest;" for her life had been very weary—none but herself knew how weary—a moment of light, a ray of sunshine, and then blackness, and ruin—and death!

The priest gazed and thought, "So much sin and so much loveliness. The outer man is truly no index to the soul. Well is it for us that we are taught to restrain our passions and to school our thoughts, when this is the end." And yet the man who was hardened to all softer feelings, as the glass is to aught save the diamond—the man who had abjured love, and whose heart had never beat quicker at the sound of a woman's voice, whose blood had never been stirred from its slow, stagnant course at the

sight of woman's charms, or the liquid depth of woman's eyes, felt a strange, yearning pity for the silent loveliness thus cast prostrate and helpless at his feet. Those radiant eyes, an instant ago beaming with love and hope, would never flash their glances again; that graceful, suffering mouth would never utter words of endearment, or passionate, soul-stirring agony; tears, passion, smiles, despair even, had left their throne to Death, and he reigned alone in sullen, triumphant majesty. A moment or two the priest gazed—a tear-drop gathered in his eye, he gently took the lily that lay in the dead girl's impassive hand, and then he turned abruptly on his heel and left the chamber of death.

A woman past the prime of life stood under the porch, fragrant with clambering roses and sweet-scented honeysuckle and jessamine, of a small cottage, enclosed in its

own little garden, near the outskirts of London. Her hand shaded her eyes from the bright noonday glare, while she gazed wistfully up the dusty road, and across the common, where a few white ducks paddled in a small pond. The sky was blue and smiling, and the song of the birds sounded joyously from the powdered hedge-rows; but the woman's face was worn and weary, and her gaze was fixed and sad, as if she had been waiting and watching hopelessly for many days. A large, lazy tortoiseshell cat had followed its mistress out of the cottage, and now purred and rubbed its head insidiously against her clean cotton gown; but she heeded it not, as she looked longingly farther and farther into the distance. A butcher's cart dashing by broke the silence for a moment; but the whirl of dust passed, and the woodlark's notes echoed fresher as the breeze wafted nearer the

honeyed smell of the furze in full flower on the common.

The woman sighed—a sigh that told of grief, and passively-born wearing sorrow, and turned to re-enter the cottage. Suddenly a London cab drove up at the door, and the driver asked in a gruff voice, as if he thought on this hot summer's day it was hard to earn a fare by such a long drive, whether she could direct him to Widow James' Ivy Cottage.

“This 'ere place is 'Ampstead,” said he crossly; “but where them new-fangled names of Hivy and Hacacia is to be found, I can't for the life of me make out. I've asked about a dozen people, and none on 'em knows.”

“This is Ivy Cottage,” returned the woman gently, “and I'm the widow James, what is it you want with me?”

“It ain't me, it's the gentleman and baby

inside," answered the cabman, pointing with his whip to the inhabitants of the vehicle.

The widow started as if with a presentiment, as the Padre let himself out of the cab, carrying the sleeping child as if it were a piece of sugar, and would fall to pieces in his hand. He had had great misgivings about his capabilities for nursing during the drive; but fortunately the far-seeing nurse had fed the baby amply before starting, and it had remained all the time in a pleased state of sleep.

"You ugly little raw-boned creature," thought the Padre, "who would think your mother was so beautiful; and I daresay, if she had lived, she would have thought you a cherub, and perfection itself! The infatuation of women for these squalling, tiresome pieces of curiosity is something marvellous!"

It was with a great sense of relief that he found himself at his journey's end, and de-

posited his charge safely in Widow James's motherly arms. The latter looked much astonished at the unusual travelling companion to a Roman Catholic priest ; but with an instinct of delicacy and fine feeling, which seemed to belie the poverty of her surroundings, she asked no questions, but quietly motioned her visitor to follow her into the cottage.

She laid the still sleeping child quietly on the simple horsehair couch, which formed the chief luxury and ornament of the small parlour, and then said, turning to the priest, who had sat moodily down,

“What would you please to want, sir? Will you take a cup of tea, or a glass of currant wine? I am afraid that is all the refreshment I have got to offer you, and that is but poor, after your hot, dusty drive.”

“Thanks, thanks, my good woman,” said the priest, rousing himself. “I do not want

any refreshment; but sit down, for we have long and serious matters to talk over." The woman's face fell, but she seated herself without further comment, and her visitor continued: "You say you are the widow James, and I believe I am not wrong in concluding that you had a daughter, and a very beautiful girl she was?"

"Oh! sir," exclaimed the poor woman, clasping her hands eagerly together, "can you give me any news of her? I have been in such dreadful anxiety and grief about her. I believe I was a bit harsh to her, poor girl! But, you know, sir, it breaks a mother's heart to see her only child going astray, and she powerless to save her! But I will never be harsh again, if she will only come back. Pray, pray persuade her to do so, if you know where she is, sir!"

She stopped, and looked imploringly at the Padre. He dealt the blow as gently as

he could, but it must come, and he felt it kinder to have it over as quickly as possible. He said, in a grave, benevolent tone, without a tremble in his voice, "My poor daughter, be comforted, you will never see your child again on earth; but she is gone, I hope, to a better, happier world!"

The widow stared a moment, as if not comprehending the import of his words; then her head fell forward on the table, without a sound, without a groan. The priest waited, he let her recover from the shock before he spoke again. The silent, believing, hopeless grief moved him more than many tears and lamentations; to such he might have been hard and callous, but to the moral strength and quiet endurance of a broken heart, the training of the priest could do full justice. There was no sound in the little parlour; the priest sat watching the motionless woman, the loud ticking of the

clock alone broke the silence with its monotonous drone, and outside the voices of the village children at their play jarred strangely on the ear. Suddenly the woman lifted her head; her worn and furrowed face was pale and ghastly, her eyes were red and swollen, but not a tear eased her misery, while her hands trembled and shook as if with palsy, and her parched tongue almost refused its utterance. At last she gasped out,

"Oh! say it is not true! Do not be so cruel!—do not tell me I shall never—never see my darling more! She is so young, so beautiful!"

The priest answered: "She *was* very young and very beautiful, but she is gone. I have brought you something to cherish for her sake—a legacy she left you—her child!"

The woman started up, seized the baby, and gazed devouringly again and again into its face.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, wildly, "it is too true; those are Lucy's eyes, that is her little mouth, that smiled so lovingly at me. Ah! woe is me!—woe is me!"

She laid the child down again, and sat rocking herself to and fro, murmuring, "My darling!—my own lost darling!" utterly unconscious of the presence of a listener, or of aught save her deep, absorbing grief. The Padre rose, and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Will you not cherish the treasure she left you?—will you not tend and love this little creature for her sake?—will you not remember that each action performed for her child is a proof of love towards your lost one? Rouse yourself, then, and welcome the gift of Heaven—you, a mother, seek to replace both parents to a motherless babe."

The last words seemed to rouse her; she

said, eagerly—"Oh! tell me, tell me, sir, since I believe you; I know you are kind and good—pity my despair, but tell me, tell me more!"

The priest re-seated himself, and seeing she was inclined to listen, repeated the story which he knew, though he was unable to supply any of the previous links.

"And now," he concluded, "perhaps you can give me some idea of who the father may be, as I will then seek him out, and make him contribute—the least he can do—to the subsistence of his own child."

At this speech the widow's eyes dilated; she raised herself with the majesty of a Deborah, and standing erect, while she stretched out her hand defiantly towards where the sleeping child lay, she exclaimed, the words coming with a vehemence like fire out of her hitherto faltering mouth,

"Ah! sir, do I know him? Well I do;

and if I did not, no place in heaven or earth should shield him from my vengeance. May the curses of heaven light upon him who wrought the ruin and the death of the fairest of God's creatures! 'Twas he corrupted her mind with his foul, serpent-like whispers—'twas he betrayed her from her mother's roof, because he knew the power of a mother's love; 'twas he that killed her—killed her with his neglect, dishonour, and cruelty! Curses on him!—I say curses on him who breaks the peace of the widow and the orphan, and leads astray those who are defenceless! May his own sins light upon his head!—may he see himself forsaken of his friends, and yearning for the water which the street dog licks up!—may he be alone, and writhing on his death-bed, while his deadliest enemy dances for joy!—may he plead for mercy, and find none—he who had no mercy for the innocent!—may

his last days be misery, and his last hours despair, and may I live to see it !—may the love of child or friend be never his, and may death rob him of all he cherishes ! Curses on him, the wrath of Heaven blast and blacken his corpse, and deny peace to his soul—he who robbed me of my only, my darling treasure !”

She stopped, and sinking down, burst into hysterical, exhausting tears, which shook her frame with the violence of sobs, tenfold more fearful from the strength with which they had been hitherto repressed. At last her passion and her strength forsook her, the big drops rolled unresisted down her cheeks, her lips quivered, and her whole body trembled ; but calmness returned, and with it withering, tranquil despair. The priest took advantage of her quietude to speak soothingly to her, and, after a few moments, she was able to listen to his arguments.

"Tell me," he said, "now all you know, that I may help and advise you to the best of my ability. What passed the last few months since your daughter left your roof between her and her seducer, who may perhaps, after all, be her husband, though I think it very doubtful we shall ever know this; but with the assistance of your knowledge, we may gain some clue to the unhappy girl's final history. Do you think she was married?"

"Do I think so?—no, sir, as sure as there is a God of heaven, my poor girl was deceived and betrayed! Do you think she would have died in a hospital if it had not been to hide her shame from her mother? No, sir, he who ruined her was far too much of a *gentleman* to marry her—he was a peer—you may have heard his name—I believe he is respected in the world—Lord Mountjoy."

The widow said the last words half-inquiringly, as if awaiting an answer in the affirmative, but she was both startled and surprised at the change which passed over the priest's face at the mention of his name. From a quick, collected, almost indifferent listener, he was suddenly transformed into an eager, anxious questioner—he started from his chair, and seizing the widow's hand, exclaimed,

“Lord Mountjoy!—what do you know of him?—tell me all you know, it is of the greatest, the most vital importance—conceal nothing—whatever you do, conceal nothing.”

The woman looked alarmed, as if she feared this were a sudden attack of madness, and then continued, drawing herself a little back,

“What I know of him—I know nothing, beyond that he is like many rich lords, who seek only their own gratification and plea-

sure at the expense of the souls and bodies of poorer folks. I often warned poor Lucy against him. I told her he would bring her to ruin, and that he meant no good, with all his pretty speeches and kind visits to a cottage, and long walks with her into the fields, but she would not heed—she always thought it would come right; and I did not know what I do now, that he was married, and, even had he wished it, could not have righted her.”

“But his wife has been dead several years,” answered the priest, still drawing out the widow; “and had he wished it, he could have married your daughter quite well, though there was a great difference in their ages.”

“His wife is not dead, sir,” returned the widow decidedly.

“What do you mean? Why, she has been in her grave these five years!”

"Did she die in Italy, then, sir?" asked the widow doubtfully.

"In Italy! No, of course not; she had a grand funeral, and was buried at Kensal Green—you might have seen it in the newspapers; they always put in the births and deaths of such great people, and give them a paragraph to themselves, as if it wasn't dust to dust just as with poor people."

"I think we must be speaking of different individuals," said the widow with a puzzled look. "I know that the wife I mean is not dead, and he could not have buried her with pomp, as he neglected and deserted her, and, I believe, scarcely knows where she is, even."

"Neglected!—deserted! Pray explain yourself, my good woman," said the priest, drawing nearer, his keen grey eyes in an agony of expectation; "pray do not be so incoherent, and begin by telling me all you know of this matter."

“Well, sir, it’s just this. My dearest husband was an artist—a sculptor on wood, and had great talent, so much so that we lived in positive affluence—very different from the poverty you now see here,” added the widow, glancing sadly round the barely-furnished room; “and in his leisure hours he would spend many moments in doing little bits of things to embellish our pretty parlour; and in the evening would chat and talk with Lucy, and tell her about the beautiful pictures and carvings he had seen in Italy. The girl had a good education—at least, as good as I could give her; but, you see, it has availed nothing,” sighed the poor bereaved mother, wiping away a tear. “However, she grew up with a fancy for luxuries and everything that was artistic and beautiful, quite above her station; and thus, when her father died, and we became poor, she would not let me sell all the pictures

and carvings he had hung upon the walls, and which she had been accustomed to see from childhood. I humoured her in this, as I did in most of her fancies; but when she had gone and left me desolate, I bethought me it was best to sell those gewgaws, and realize a small sum for them, which might be useful in case of her ever returning to me in want."

"Thoughtful mother!" broke in the priest, "you were indeed quite right!"

"I had no doubt of getting a good price for these articles, for they had often been the admiration of the visitors to our cottage, and I had heard them called very valuable by people who collected such things. So one morning I packed them up—at least, as many as I could take—and sallied forth into the city, to go to the first collector of china and pictures who I thought would be likely to buy. But they were very hard that

morning ; in shop after shop people shook their heads ; trade was dull, they could not buy. The goods were worthless, so they said ; and weary and heartbroken, I knew not where to turn. At last, in an old Jew's shop, when the same sad words fell again on my ear, I sank down on a chair, and moaned aloud. A woman who was busy pawning a silver spoon, and who had already looked at me with pitiful eyes, now touched me on the shoulder, and asked me if I was in grief. Ah ! sir, it is always the poor who help the poor ; and those who have known what it is to want, are much more charitable than the rich. This woman was poor, but she had a kind heart, and when I told her my tale of woes, she persuaded the Jew merchant to take some of my things, and give me a small price for them, and then invited me to her house, to rest, she said. She was an old woman, who

spoke with a foreign accent, and whose face was furrowed with lines, as if she had known grief; perhaps this was what first drew me towards her, for there is a strange sympathy in sorrow. Well, she was an old servant, she told me, who supported herself by washing—she was Italian by birth, and had been now some years in England, since she left her last mistress. I told her about my daughter's loss, and she asked me the name and rank of her seducer. When I said Lord Mountjoy, 'Oh! God!' she exclaimed in Italian, clasping her hands, 'is there no judgment for the wicked? Again—again that man! Madam,' she added, turning to me, 'take my word for it, if you see your daughter again, it will be only as a dishonoured, disgraced woman!' I wept, and she tried to comfort me; and we talked, and then it was she told me that long years ago she had known Lord Mount-

joy in Italy, that she had been summoned as nurse and midwife, to attend upon a fair young Italian, who called herself his wife, and who gave birth to a little daughter. She said this young creature was an angel of purity and devotion; that she loved this man, then young, with an intense, unquestioning love, that she was really married to him. The poor young wife had shown her the wedding-ring and the marriage certificate, and was happy and trusting. She stayed and nursed the little Madeline—such was the child's name—for a year or two; and then Lord Mountjoy discarded her—she never knew why. She heard afterwards he had deserted his wife; but she never met him more, only last year, as she accompanied a lady on her wedding trip, she swears she met Lord Mountjoy's wife much altered, at Milan, and that she knew her directly."

The priest was lost in thought. "I re-

member," he suddenly exclaimed, "Madame Scarsi was at Milan last year, for a week, just before Madeline's confirmation—there is no doubt it must be she. Tell me, my good woman, did this Italian, whose name and address you must give me, know of Lord Mountjoy's second marriage, which he contracted six years ago with an English lady?"

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"I do not know," answered the widow James reflectively; "she did not tell me, but she said nothing would give her more satisfaction than to see Lord Mountjoy brought to judgment. She called him a villain and an assassin, and said he had gone nigh to break his wife's heart. This is all I know, sir; and I should not have paid so much attention, only I listened because it was all about my daughter's seducer, and that before that I had hoped he might marry her, as I had never heard of any wife."

The widow stopped, overcome by the sad thoughts that crowded in upon her at the memory of her interview with the Italian woman, which had dashed to the ground any hopes she might have still cherished ; and the priest exclaimed, breaking in upon the silence—

“ I see it all now ! Lord Mountjoy’s first wife was the legal wife ; he tried—and succeeded, it seems—to disavow the marriage, but Madame Scarsi *is* his lawful wife, and Madeline legitimate. You do not know how much I am indebted to you for this information. With the help of your Italian friend, I have no doubt of being able to prove it, and I bless the hour which brought me here. Quick ! what is the address of the woman, that I may lose no time in finding her out ? ”

He had quite forgotten the consolation and grief in the prospect

of a satisfactory termination to his search of the past months. He had determined to prove Madeline's parentage, and he had carved for himself a future which he intended to attain at all costs—at all risks. Even Lord Mountjoy's last wickedness in seducing and deserting poor Lucy was balm to him, as it enabled him to trace out the secret of his life. The widow James raised her head wonderingly, and said,

“Here is Anna Capelli's address—that is her name—but she may already have left her lodgings, as it is now more than two months since I have seen her.”

She rose and walked to a drawer, whence she took out a small work-box, and from it a dirty folded paper, which she handed to the priest. He took it eagerly, and read, in a shaky, pointed foreign hand, “Anna Capelli, washerwoman, 2, Dun's Court, Stone Alley, Leadenhall.” He stowed it

carefully in his pocket-book, and remarked, as he did so—

“I do not know the locality, but no doubt the cabman will;” and scarcely vouchsafing another word beyond the hurried information that the child was baptised Lucius, he left the cottage, and re-entered the cab, which waited at the door. The widow followed him, and strained her eyes after him till the cab was out of sight; then, turning wearily, she caught the child in her arms, and clasped it in a long, agonised embrace.

CHAPTER X.

THE days sped lightly by at Chillingworth. The old castle echoed to the sounds of mirth and laughter and the fresh tones of joyous young voices, as it had not done for many a long year; the creaking oak floors quivered under the light dancing steps of the fair Countess, and the mullioned windows stood open all day to admit the perfume of the roses and the scent of the jessamine, that twined its branches lovingly round the cold surface of the carved embrasures. The weather was August weather of the very finest and most enjoyable, with warm, balmy nights, that invited to moonlight strolls upon the terrace; and fresh dewy mornings, in which rides in the cool

woods were not only acceptable, but necessary ; and soft hot afternoons, in which the drone of the bees and hum of the insects made nothing but lazy repose possible, and thought or hard work was out of the question. And the inmates of the castle appreciated the tenderness of the elements, and enjoyed themselves as thoroughly, in a dreamy, listless kind of way, as was possible for any human creature liable to ills and sorrows.

Madeline had not known such calm happiness since the early days of her marriage, when she had sentimentalized, in the first flush of love, in the gondolas and on the balconies of Venice, and thought life and happiness almost intoxicating. She forgot the weary days passed in the smoke and heat of London, the hours of remorse and sorrow that she had spent in her little back sitting-room, looking at her flowers,

and wishing she had never been born ; she forgot the momentary cloud that had come between her and her husband—for was he not hers now entirely and fully ?—was not his brow again bright, and were not his blue eyes sunny as ever ? No, Padre Stefano was mistaken, after all, and there was no need for her to humble and deny herself, and scourge her tender body, and wear sackcloth and ashes for the sins of others ; the world was fair, and its inmates were good, and her life was, after all, going to be as sunny as she had dreamt in her happiest maiden hours, when she wove castles in the air by the blue waves of the Adriatic, or sat under the vine conning her favourite poets, and looking out into the distance, while vague thoughts of womanhood and love flitted through her brain. Her light, impulsive Italian temperament was swayed by every influence—the song of the birds, the sunlight

on the lattice, summer, the blue sky, anything and everything could chase away the gloomy thoughts from Madeline's young brow. Arthur, too, was devoted as in the days of their honeymoon; he would look in her face, and stroke her hair, and tell her she was fairer and more loveable than ever, and his old boyish spirits, cramped and chilled by contact with his cold, hardened relations, returned to gladden the young wife's heart. Hand in hand, as children still, they would stroll through the woods, or sit under the shade of wide-spreading beech or oak, while he swiftly sketched the fallen tree or the murmuring waterfall, and rattled on in the free, careless, half-cynical, half-good-tempered mood in which he would rail at the world and its follies, while Madeline listened and laughed with the ever ready mirth of youth.

And Lady Chillingworth herself, the mis-

treasure of all this fair domain, was her heart light, and her smile joyous? Yes, even to her those were happy days; in the midst of nature, with its soft, calm influence, in the height of sunshine and summer, who could feel sad, who could mourn over a lost or marred youth, while the vernal green of spring had not yet passed away, and all spoke of love and life! Even Gertrude, in new scenes, amongst friendly faces, felt soothed and quieted, like a child that is hushed on its mother's bosom; the clang and whirl of town no longer jarred on her ear, the dull, never-ending round of monotonous pleasure-seeking had ceased; the tired nerves, braced to endure the mocking glance of society, relaxed, and weariness no longer strenuously concealed, in consequence was less felt.

Altogether Gertrude was more satisfied with herself and her lot than she had ever

been before. At twenty, with beauty, riches, honour, a high position, and plenty of admirers and friends, it is difficult to feel constantly despairingly unhappy, though at times a word, a look, would make her wince as she remembered her coronet, and the sacrifice which had purchased it. As for any idea of loving or being happy with Lord Chillingworth, she had long since given that up ; he had fulfilled his part of the bargain—he had given her all he had, his title and his wealth, and if she wanted more, why, she must find it for herself. She had begun to understand that their ways lay apart, that though man and wife, and living under the same roof, yet their ideas and existence were in reality as different as if one had inhabited the South and the other the North Pole. She had a husband, indeed, but no companion ; she bore his name, but she could never claim

his heart; side by side they might live, but hand in hand they could never go; she was his wife in name, but no more—rather less to him than the family picture on the walls, the brood mare in his paddocks; she was a necessary accessory to a rich man's home, but no part and parcel of himself; he cared for her comfort and ease as he did for that of all his dependents; but her heart, her affection, he had never given a thought to.

Those bright August days were not hours of poetry and enjoyment to Lord Chillingworth—they were conducive to fishing, they were good for the crops, and admirable for racing purposes, otherwise he would as soon, and rather sooner, have had nipping, raw December weather, in which he could hunt and steeple-chase, and have “some fun.” The flowers put forth their buds in vain for him, in vain the hay scented the air, the growth and development of all in

nature had no charms for him ; but he could have told you to a T the good points of a yearling, or which fly was best for trout-fishing in July, and whether the bull bitch weighed over or under six pounds.

The scene on the race-course at Ascot had revealed worlds to Gertrude ; she saw that Lord Chillingworth had *married* her, and that *that* was the greatest sacrifice she could expect from him. She saw that low society was his element, and that the refined charms of educated women were dull as ditch-water to his tastes, which demanded more exciting and highly-spiced food. The discovery was bitter to her at the moment, more especially as her involuntarily colder and more altered manner was never discovered or remarked by the unconscious cause of it ; and thus the young wife swallowed the affront, feeling in her inmost soul intensely aggrieved. There is nothing that

does away so soon with the sense of injury as the being able to complain freely, and this she had never a chance of doing ; so, like a broken arrow, it remained rankling in her heart, the sore festering for lack of a kind, courageous hand to draw the barbed point from the bleeding wound. Madeline was a great comfort to her in those days. The two women never discoursed upon their respective sorrows, which lay hidden away in their bosoms ; but there was a tender pity about Mrs. Dormer, that showed she knew and felt for the lonely position of the fair Countess ; and, in her turn, Gertrude strove to show that the knowledge of Madeline's birth did not affect her feelings in the smallest degree.

And last among the list of Gertrude's consolations was the presence of Sir Ronald Minton, with his chivalrous, respectful devotion, that reminded one of the old days of

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Duguesclin or Bayard, when a lady-love was the worship of a life, and a tender sentiment pervaded even the most warlike in the midst of strife and battle. Sir Ronald never spoke a word that the most jealous of husbands might not have overheard; but his manner, his tone, his looks, were quite sufficient to make a woman's bosom throb with pulsations of joyous security.

Gertrude, who had never known kindness, who had grown up in the cold shade of a worldly family, appreciated this atmosphere of love and devotion, which enveloped her like a cloud, subtle and intangible, but ever present—lulling her to sleep in the arms of security, calming her vainest fears, approving her most timid aspirations, coiling itself round her whole being, till she could no longer disentangle or divest herself from it. Oh! it was an intoxicating sensation, and so subtle, so penetrating, that she

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could neither have given it a nature or a name. She was not startled out of her dream by the carping remarks of society, or the kind warnings of friends, or even the passionate tones of a lover's voice, which would have shown her at once her danger and her insecurity. No, she just glided on the stream of events, letting the days pass gently unheeded by, thinking it was all to last for ever—for ever! Ah! Gertrude, your awakening will be sudden and sharp, and the languor you have lulled your senses in will but make the pang more bitter—more agonizing!

Lady Chillingworth had chosen for her own sanctum a small room in one of the towers of the Castle, with a large bow-window facing the sun, and looking out over the gorgeous flower-gardens, right away through vistas of park and forest, where the fern grew wild and high, and the deer

herded unmolested, to the far distant purple hills. It was a grand view—one of the finest from the Castle, and that, combined with its sunny aspect, had been the chief motive of Lady Chillingworth's choice. Here she was allowed to remain unmolested—here she hung her pictures and arranged her treasures and her flowers. She had a London upholsterer down, who achieved marvels in the way of adornment; the walls were covered with sky-blue silk, and the windows draped with festoons of fairy-woven muslin and silk; the light was kept out by rosy blinds, and however hot it might be out of doors, here it was always cool and pleasant. Many were the hours Gertrude passed in this enchanting boudoir; and, under pretexts of trying a song, or borrowing a book, or sundry other devices as transparent and as ingenious, Sir Ronald would find his way in also, and sit talking

or silent while he watched her slight fingers busy at her embroidery, or the sun shine on the soft waves of her hair, or the rosy light come and go in fitful gushes on her fair cheek, while her eyes sparkled and shone with the soft deep glow that innocence and love had kindled there. And then, when the sun got low, or the room felt oppressive, Gertrude would fetch her shady broad-brimmed hat, and they would saunter forth through the rose gardens, and out of the little wicket gate, and find themselves in the deep umbrageous woods, alone with the rustling of the branches, and the cooing of the wood-pigeons, with the blue, cloudless sky over their heads, and no envious ear to listen to what they said, or mark her blushes and her smiles. And as their feet trod the soft mossy turf, and her light dress brushed against the tangled underwood, or caught in the thorny blackberry and gorze bushes, the

silence was unbroken, save by the distant ripple of a mountain stream, which trickled down through the ferns and trailing water-plants, till it reached the open river, or the crashing of the startled deer, as they heard the sound of human voices, and sped away through the underwood, to more secure, more hidden haunts; the silence of nature was upon them, and their hearts were too full to speak.

There, in those solemn moments of untold happiness, a dawning would pass over Gertrude's soul; for one moment her heart would leap with joy, and then a dark fear would seize upon her, as she remembered no love could come to her, no sweet communion be hers, the chained one for life, fettered by her own act, by her own free will, and cut off for ever from innocent, reciprocated passion! Not that this was clearly revealed in her own thoughts, but a

dim conviction would dawn upon her, that there *was* bliss in the world, such bliss as she had dreamt of, and that *that* never—never could be hers, though she might live through long ages, though she might struggle and suffer till the soul was faint, and the hair white, still it could avail her nothing ! Sir Ronald never appeared to notice any change in her manner—though her hand would tremble in his, though her beautiful eyes, when uplifted as she spoke, were sometimes suffused with tears, though she would hesitate, and break off suddenly in a speech, and perhaps never end it,—all these little signs so palpable, so easy of explanation, Sir Ronald never seemed to see ; and he would talk on in his calm, soothing tones, which acted on her nervous system with the effect of an anodyne, lulling her into dreamy security.

One day Lady Chillingworth was sitting

in her boudoir, with her hands clasped listlessly, and an unopened book in her lap ; a habit of indolence seemed to have grown upon her of late, and she would sit motionless, like a girl in her teens who is dreaming of the lover she expects to see.

Gertrude started as a low knock came at the door, and hurriedly answered,

“Come in.”

At this encouragement Madeline's face, with its gorgeous Southern beauty, appeared anxiously looking in. At sight of her sister-in-law, Gertrude seemed relieved, and exclaimed,

“Oh ! Madeline, I am very glad to see you. I could not think who it was wanted me. I so seldom have visitors here in my sanctuary.”

“I am sorry to have disturbed you,” answered Madeline, with a care-worn look, coming slowly in ; “but I felt I should like

to talk to you, and I thought I was likely to find you alone at this hour."

"Yes," said Gertrude, sighing lightly, as she motioned to her to sit down by her—"Lord Chillingworth does not often give me the pleasure of his company in the mornings—dogs and horses are exacting loves."

Madeline looked gravely at her as she spoke. Beneath the jesting tone a wounded feeling showed itself, but Gertrude did not give her time to make any remark before she resumed—"But what is it you have to say?—your troubled look makes me fear it is bad news. Is—is your mother ill?"

"No, no, thank God!" answered Madeline, quickly, "and, indeed, it is a trifle, and I am a fool to fret myself about it; but the truth is, Arthur wishes to return to London," she added, getting the words quickly out, as if they cost her to utter.

"What! and take you too?" asked Ger-

trude, stroking the hand Madeline had laid upon her lap.

"No ; and indeed I had so much rather go with him. All my pleasure here will be gone with him—I mean, except seeing you," she added ; "but he wishes to go by himself, and he says he has business."

"And so I daresay he has," returned Gertrude, soothingly—a husband's absence was to her such an every-day occurrence ; "you see, dear, he must not quite give up his profession, and he *has* been rather lazy lately. I daresay he feels that by himself he has more chance of being industrious than when we are all here to distract him at any moment."

"Oh ! but," said Mrs. Dormer, "I do not think he means to work. I am sure I am always urging him to give himself up to his art, and *I* never stand in his way ; but—but I have misgivings about this business."

"Why, is it a little jealous wife I am advising?" broke in Gertrude, laughing.

"Not jealous in the sense *you* mean," said Madeline gravely, unmoved by her companion's mirth—"not afraid of his affections being bestowed elsewhere—not afraid of being an injured woman, or for one moment imagining that he is duping or deceiving me—no, Gertrude, thank God I trust and respect my husband thoroughly. I know his love for me is not a passing fancy, but I do fear his impulsive, easily-led nature being unsettled and talked over by the machinations of designing people. I have not forgotten how grandly he behaved to me in marrying a penniless—a worse than friendless girl; few men would have acted as he did, and that is why I feel that my life, my heart's blood, my youth—all is his, at his service, and that if the hand of a wife is powerful to serve, mine both can and shall

save Arthur. Ah! Gertrude, there is more in your brother than the world sees. True, he is easily led, but he feels deeply—very deeply, and I am afraid where this retentive susceptibility may lead him.”

“But you have not yet told me what it is you fear,” said Gertrude, sympathizingly.

“That is what I scarcely know,” answered Madeline, doubtfully; “but I feel there is danger, though in what shape, and how to be averted, I can scarcely tell.”

“But surely you must have some idea?”

“I think,” said Mrs. Dormer, slowly, “that he is dissatisfied with his lot. I think he is beating his wings against the bars which custom and his position have hemmed him in with. I think he is cut to the core at his mother’s behaviour to me. Forgive me if I wound your feelings,” added Madeline, apologetically, as Lady Chillingworth winced slightly. “I must tell you these things, or

you would not understand my meaning. And, lastly, I fear he is worried about money !”

“Money !” exclaimed Gertrude, quickly, half rising from her seat. “Can I do nothing for you ? What is the use of being rich, if my favourite brother is worried for lack of money ?”

“Thanks, dearest Gertrude,” said Madeline, drawing her down again upon her chair. “I know your generous heart ; but it is not that. Arthur would accept charity from no man ; as a right, yes ; as a gift, no !”

“But as a loan, to be repaid !” eagerly broke in Lady Chillingworth. Madeline shook her head.

“That is not what I mean ; but I think Arthur is so goaded and hurt at what he calls the injustice and misery of his position, that I feel he will take steps to get what he wants for himself, and the persons who can

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help him to this end are those I fear.”

“Money-lenders—Jews?” asked Gertrude.

“Oh! surely he is safe from their clutches?”

“He has told me nothing,” returned Madeline, “and I am too ignorant of these matters to know exactly; but he has something weighing on his mind, and he will not confide in me. I know,” she added, humbly, “I have no business to demand it as a right, but I should be so glad to suffer with him!”

“In your position,” said Gertrude, glancing at Madeline’s fevered cheeks and glistening eyes, “he probably would not like to vex or annoy you with his cares.”

“What’s my life,” broke out Madeline, vehemently, “that I should grudge it him who gave me happiness? Ah! he little knows me, if he thinks I care for my comfort in preference to his!”

There was a short silence after these words were uttered; an utter confusion of

ideas reigned in Lady Chillingworth's brain; such a turn of events had never occurred to her—she had expected Arthur to go on quietly, as all younger sons have done before him, and she could scarcely believe Madeline had not erred in her statement.

“I see you disbelieve me,” said the latter, at last. “God grant I may be wrong, but Arthur is very unsettled, and it is hard to deceive the loving eyes of a wife!”

Then she proceeded to tell Gertrude of the unknown shadow that had fallen between them in London, of his constant absences, and apparent difficulty in accounting for them—and ended, at last, in imbuing her sister-in-law with vague fears, nearly as alarming and as unanswerable as her own.

CHAPTER XI.

WE left Padre Stefano armed with the address of the Italian woman given him by the widow James, and at last on the supposed track which was to lead to the discovery of Lord Mountjoy's well-arranged villainy, and cover with confusion its high-born author. Not doubting for a moment that he should find all possible information with the person he was directed to, the priest determined to lose no time; and accordingly the same cab that had conveyed him to Ivy Cottage was ordered to drive him to Dun's Court, wherever that might be.

The sullen driver, who was by this time rather overcome with the heat of the sun, and certain beery potations imbibed at the

public-house, where he had been refreshing himself and his horse, grumbled at the suggestion of another long and weary drive ; but the promise of a double fare conquered his repugnance, and he set off, still muttering to himself about "the queer business of them papistical chaps."

Padre Stefano's thoughts, as he leant back in the rumbling vehicle, which sent the dust rolling up in clouds right in at the window, but had not the power to disturb his reflections, were of the very pleasantest. At last he saw himself nearing the goal of his ambition—he saw himself, as the avenging power, administering justice, awarding punishment to the guilty, covering with dishonour and shame the great man who had threatened to kick him out of the house ; he saw him suing for mercy, and himself omnipotent to strike him to the dust ; he saw the recipients of his bounty covering him with honour

and riches; he saw the erring sheep brought back to the fold, and himself the instrument of its conversion; he could picture to himself the consternation of the Dormer family when presented with a Catholic son, and a legitimate, honourable daughter-in-law, whom they could no longer treat with contempt and scorn. He saw himself a bishop, rich and honoured, reaping the reward of his devotion to the interests of religion, and publicly thanked by the Holy Father in Rome for his zeal in proselytism. Visions of great and substantial glory rose before him, as he thought how well he had spent the time of his short sojourn in England, and how wide and well-spread were the nets he had laid for those he intended soon to have within his grasp. Love, and the softer attributes and follies of men, might be dead within him, but ambition reigned supreme, and his self-abnegation was only

that of a reasonable being who sees he may attain a greater amount of happiness by denying himself those brutish pleasures which the fool so fondly indulges in.

There is, perhaps, scarcely a worse sin than that hugging of self for a purpose—that silent control of the passions, that they may be subservient to the will that brings forth a fuller birth of wickedness. Padre Stefano despised weakness, but his iron self-command was but a more thorough dissimulated selfishness. Even at this moment, had he not forsaken the poor woman whose sad history had but just moved him to pity, without a thought as to her despair?—was he not, even, rather glad of the discovery of fresh wickedness and guilt that served his purpose, and led him on the track he was pursuing? Truly the motive that impelled him on what a bystander would have called a righteous search, was as self-

ish and as contemptible as what in a worldling would be stigmatized as the lusts of the flesh. The drive was long, and the Padre was eager; but at last they arrived in the dense middle of the crowded city. The driver threaded his way through dark and dingy alleys, where groups of ill-clad dirty women and children squatted near the doors of their houses; and the scowling, fierce expression of their faces betokened the battle they waged against misery and starvation. The sleek, well-fed priest drew his coat around him, as if to avoid contamination—the squalid inhabitants of these dens of poverty and vice seemed a world so far removed from his dainty sensibilities. At last the cabman stopped, as if uncertain how to proceed. Padre Stefano put his head out, and asked angrily what was the matter.

“Matter enough; these ’ere lanes is enough to confuse anybody. What a per-

son can want in these low places I can't think," said the driver, half savagely; "you'd better give me my fare, and let me go. You've kep' me out and at your orders long enough, I think!"

"Softly! softly!" said the priest, getting out, and looking about in a hopeless sort of way; "here, let us ask these people."

He advanced towards a sickly-looking woman, with a baby in her arms, who was watching the proceedings, and to whose skirts clung two more unwashed, ragged children.

"Which is Dun's Court?" he asked.

"You can't drive there, sir," answered the woman, awed into respect by the priest's commanding look; "up the next alley; and a carriage can't go nearer than where you are now. I'll show you the way, if you like."

"Do, my good woman," said the priest,

relieved, as he ordered the cab to wait, and proceeded to follow his guide.

“It's difficult for folks as don't know these parts to find their way about,” said the woman, as she preceded him. “The blessed sun don't find much space for hisself, and it's a dull spot for them as is used to the country; but, Lor' bless you, custom teaches you to mind nothin'. I daresay if I was in the green fields agin, I should be wearying for the chimneys and the noise.”

Padre Stefano made no reply; he was wondering what could make life worth having in dingy alleys like these, and how people could care to prolong such a miserable state of existence. As he walked along the dirty little lane, in which the gutters were wide and odorous, and the smells of life and humanity most repulsive, swarms of little half-naked children ran up against him, as involuntarily he disturbed the mud

pies they were making, or stepped into the middle of an exciting game of marbles. A prolonged stare followed him as the groups re-closed again, and shouted at their dismal play louder than before. At last they stood before a tall, black house at the end of a court, into which the daylight shone only with a yellow, smoky reflection, and the woman knocked at a small door, which had originally been green, but was now so begrimed with dust, that the primitive colour was undistinguishable. After some moments of waiting, it was opened by an old hag, with piercing grey eyes, and a yellow handkerchief bound round her head.

"What is it?" she said; "first or third floor wanted?"

"Anna Capelli," said the priest, advancing; "is she at home?—I must speak to her!"

"Anna Capelli, fifth floor—oh! she's gone," said the old hag, shutting the door.

again. "You shouldn't give folks trouble for nothing," she muttered, vindictively.

In vain the priest knocked again, and shouted, in hopes he might move her to a more lenient behaviour; but no, his efforts were fruitless. No sound or sight issued from the grim, black, windowless house, and the woman who had served as his guide, and had hitherto stood aloof, now stepped forward and said,

"I know Peggy—Stone Peggy, we call her, because she's so hard; she'll not open the door again, so you needn't expect it."

"But what am I to do?" answered the priest. "I must speak to the woman who lives in that house—she's a washerwoman," he added, in despair—"perhaps you know her?"

"Oh! yes, the cracked Italian; she's gone in the head, sir; she wouldn't be much use to you, but she *has* left, and her

lodgings 'as been taken these three days. If you'd told me that, I wouldn't have brought you here on a fool's errand."

The priest stood rooted to the ground—his visit there was perfectly useless!

That same afternoon, about sunset, the indefatigable priest was wending his way slowly down one of the shady avenues of Hyde Park. The air was close and sultry, a yellowish haze hung about, and though only August, the lime-trees were losing their leaves, and some few fallen ones crackled sadly under the Padre's unheeding feet. He walked with his head bent down in thought, but from time to time he would raise it, and gaze impatiently around, as if awaiting the advent of something or somebody. After a few moody turns, his face suddenly brightened, and he quickened his walk as he advanced to meet a man striding quickly towards him.

"Good morning," said the priest. "You are late, Mr. Standish."

"Yes, perhaps a few minutes," answered the new-comer, pulling out his watch, and looking at it hastily.

All his movements had a certain feverish quickness about them, and even his speech came out jagged and abrupt, as if he had not time to round his periods, or adjust his mode of expression; and now he offered the greatest contrast to the calm, dignified, almost solemn manner of the priest. But they seemed on good terms, as if their business together were thoroughly congenial, and their acquaintance a close one; so we will listen a moment to their conversation, and gather what we can from it.

"Have you seen him lately?" the priest asked.

"Who?—oh! yes, you mean young Dormer. Well, to be candid with you, I have

not seen him as often as I could wish. I believe he has been out of town with his wife—a pretty little sickly thing, I understand, and who, I suppose, takes up a good deal of his time. Curse those women!" he continued, more hurriedly—"they're always in the way, with their whinings and pinings, and——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the priest, "I know Mrs. Dormer; she is a nice creature—I am her confessor."

"Whew!" whistled his friend—"the wind's in that quarter, is it? Certainly you priests have plenty of fun, notwithstanding all your grave looks. We, who don't profess sanctity, haven't half your chances of success."

"Business, my dear sir," answered the priest, calmly, not seeming to enjoy the other's jocoseness—"let us talk of business."

"Well, I come to you to be taught," re-

joined Mr. Standish ; "for a black-coated chap, you've a wonderful knowledge of the world and its ways, and I'm a willing pupil when I find my master."

"You perfectly understand my object, do you not, Mr. Standish ?" said the priest, after a moment's pause. "The maxim of our Church is, that the end justifies the means ; consequently, if I seem to be throwing Mr. Dormer into your hands for his present ill, it is in order that it may conduce at last to his future benefit, and the glory of the Church. Entanglements and difficulties of the flesh are likely to produce an awakening of the soul."

"A very startling awakening in this case, Father Stephen," interposed his companion shyly.

"Perhaps you will kindly permit me to explain my meaning even more clearly," said the priest, no-wise abashed. "I have the

interests of Mr. Dormer's soul most entirely at heart, and I consider they will be best served by the course I intend pursuing."

"It's all the same to me," answered Mr. Standish, "but it is a lucky coincidence that our separate plans should agree so deuced well, and I'm sure I don't cavil at your *reasons* as long as they bring about the same effect as my wishes. But it certainly is odd that you and I should understand one another so remarkably well."

"I am not one of those weak minds," resumed the priest, "who shrink from the trials of this world for those they love, or have the spiritual care of; the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb, and the difficulties I see awaiting Mr. Dormer will only tend to throw him upon the bosom of the Church, where there will be much rejoicing over the returning penitent."

"Or the shorn lamb," put in Mr. Stand-

ish, who could not keep his tongue quiet. "I know some other bosom that will rejoice also, as well as the sacred bosom of the Church !"

"It is possible," continued the Padre, unheeding the interruption, "that Mr. Dormer may be in town within a few days ; I trust that you will keep up the acquaintance, and lose no chance of securing your hold upon him, even more firmly than at present. He is young, and easily turned aside from any fixed purpose ; it is peculiarly to the weakness of his character that I would address myself, and work upon his easy impulsiveness. You are clever—you are a man of the world, and I need not tell *you* that once you have found out a man's weak side, to work upon his feelings, and by his interests and wishes, is comparatively easy. Is my meaning plain ?"

"Perfectly so, and worded with the acute-

ness of your sect. 'Pon my word," said Mr. Standish, looking at him with a sort of warm admiration, "if I were not what I am, I should choose to be a priest like you. Bless my soul, *you* know enough to set the world a-gog!"

"Above all," inculcated the Priest, "do not be afraid of going too far; if he loses money, his family can well afford to pay, and it is only when he will be over head and ears in debt that he will really begin to reflect seriously. However, I trust to you, Mr. Standish. I must be going now; when shall we meet again?"

"I'll drop you a line when I next see Mr. Dormer—that will be the best thing, and tell you how matters progress. I suppose this is the most convenient place for us to meet?"

"Oh! yes," answered the priest, looking suspiciously round; "here we are unobserved, and safe from all eavesdropping. It would

not do for you to visit me at my lodgings."

"Oh! dear, no," rejoined the other, sarcastically; "the contact with me might sully that spotless cloth of yours. Good evening, father—*holy* father!"

The two dissimilar companions then parted, and each walked away in a different direction. Mike Standish was as great a character in his way as many an illustrious man. Amongst a certain doubtful, sharp-featured, money-getting fraternity, he was well known, and highly respected, as a man who had made a way and a livelihood for himself—though how, and by what lucky coincidence, few people could have told. He was not what, in the fashionable world of London, might be called a gentleman; his father's name was not in the Court Guide, and he certainly had no blue blood in his veins; but yet he held an indisputable position, and common shopkeepers or betting-

men called him Mr. Standish, while well-born sons of noble families tapped him familiarly on the shoulder, and called him "Mike, old fellow !" He was that necessary and conventional article, "all things to all men," and while he could be coarse and vulgar with the lowest of the low, no one better than he understood the exact limit at which familiarity must stop and respect begin, if he wished to keep well in with "real gentlemen." According to his own account, his life had been a chequered and a fortunate one ; his earliest recollection was running away to sea, and being shipped off in a merchantman to the East Indies, where he spent a year or two of complete and unfeigned misery ; then he again ran away, and entered as under-drudge and general servant into a large warehousing business, where he was kicked and knocked about, and picked up a little smattering of educa-

tion, and a vast knowledge of the world. But his restlessness again drove him into the streets, and how the next few years of his life were passed he could best tell himself—no doubt his living was precarious, and his shifts not always honourable, but he did support himself, until, by some lucky stroke of fate, he got into a racing stable. Here he flourished for some years, and learnt all the tricks and dealings of the turf, took to betting, and at last became a professed ring-man. In time he forsook this avocation also, and set up for a respectable judge and arbiter amongst the lower portion of racing men ; he amassed money, had the good fortune to lend some to several young men of position, and became more or less known. He was now about five and forty, hale, active, and wiry to a degree, with little eyes, that turned and twisted uneasily when you looked into them, and scrutinized you

thoroughly while they pretended to be occupied elsewhere ; altogether, a doubtful, yet respectable member of society, against whom nothing had, or ever could be alleged, and yet one whom it was generally considered unwise and undesirable to affront. Such was Mike Standish, and his acquaintance with the priest—begun quite accidentally—was only one of the minor discrepancies which existed so largely between his apparent position and the nature of the man. In the society of the Padre he showed himself as he was, the former's rare hypocrisy and self-control exciting in his corrupt mind as much respect and admiration as fine qualities would in that of an upright man. In the vitiated mind of the thief great boldness and success in crime is as invigorating, and seems as worthy of imitation, as do the great acts of a hero to the struggling soldier toiling in the rear.

CHAPTER XII.

MIKE rejoiced in what he was pleased to call his office—a dingy back room, up two pair of stairs, somewhere in the vicinity of Change Alley, a locality which he imagined invested him with an appearance of capital and respectability. What the office was for, or what business he transacted there, was not very clearly ascertained ; but there, during several hours of the day, he would sit and receive the visits of his friends, and of those who came on affairs of the mysterious business above quoted. On a brass plate on the outside door was written, “Mr. Standish, Agent ;” and the remainder of the house being occupied by a stock-broker and a dentist, it was difficult to form any

idea of his avocation from the simple notice which marked the entrance to his office. Early the next morning, after the interview with the priest, which we have detailed in our last chapter, Mike was sitting in his office, when the door was abruptly pushed open, and in came Mr. Arthur Dormer, flushed and heated, as if after a long walk. Mr. Standish rose respectfully, to make room for him on a dusty chair which stood near the table he was writing at; while his visitor just acknowledged the civility by a slight nod, and, sitting down, exclaimed,

“Here you are, as usual, at your work. What an industrious fellow you are, Standish, and cheery, too, with it all; not a bit bored or worried with the perpetual round, which must become very tedious at times!”

“Ah! Mr. Dormer,” answered the other, smiling easily, as he re-seated himself, “you haven’t had to earn your bread as I have,

by the sweat of my brow, ever since I was so high," and he measured a yard from the ground with his fingers; "if I didn't work with arms and brain, and a good will to boot, I should starve; but you, of course, are a *gentleman*."

The stress he laid upon the last word seemed to imply the immense difference in their position; but it galled the young artist, who, striking his fist down upon the wooden table with a dull thud, exclaimed,

"Curse it! it seems to me a *gentleman* in my position is synonymous with a beggar, and a beggar too who must wear his rags gracefully, and not presume to envy those who have gold and silver, and are his own flesh and blood. I tell you, it riles me, and makes me savage. I'm sick of it all—sick of the show, and the falsehood and the lie, and the smiles which are intended to cover the wound. Let me be Giles the farmer,

by all means, and work respectably and honestly for my bread, but don't let me call myself a gentleman, I who can't provide myself with the necessaries of life, as Giles can—I who am doomed to starve, and keep my hands white and soft, for fear of sullying the name of my family!"

"Well, I suppose no one will object to your not calling yourself a gentleman, if it gives you pleasure to do so," put in Mr. Standish, rather wickedly.

"You know that's not what I mean," returned the other, vehemently; "I'm not splitting straws, and arguing about names—they all come alike in the end; but what I do say is, people have no business to bring up their children helplessly in the lap of luxury, and send them to a school where the fashion is to try how little profit can be got out of years of expensive education; and then, when they reach manhood, and have all sorts of ex-

travagant idle ways and habits, to find that they are only titled beggars, rather worse off than the poor mechanic, for they have imbibed tastes which he knows nothing of, and cannot live on the pittance which contents him."

"Everyone has his grievance, sir," answered Mr. Standish pompously; "mine is that my parents never troubled their heads about me, and that I ran away to sea, and never got any education at all. We all know where our own shoe pinches; but we can't tell how much worse it pinches our neighbours. I don't complain, and yet I've had a hard life, take it all in all; but I've found some good days in it, and I expect so have you in yours. Ain't you married now, and to a pretty young wife, who, no doubt, thinks you the apple of her eye? Not that I care about women, or think them much comfort; as I told Mrs. Standish, when I married her,

the benefit was all on one side—though I suppose women are a necessary evil.”

Mr. Dormer did not probably see the relevance of the comparison between Mrs. Standish and Madeline ; or perhaps his love for his wife was still new and tender, and he could not bear to trifle with it ; but he tapped his foot on the floor impatiently, and Standish seeing he had made a mistake, though not exactly aware how, asked quickly,

“ Are you inclined to do any business this morning, sir, or did you only step in promiscuous-like ? ”

“ Well, to tell you the truth,” answered Arthur willingly, “ I’m afraid I’m getting into bad ways. I hate the sight of my painting, and you know,” he said, smiling ruefully, “ I am supposed to live by that, and the fact is I *really* am hard put to it for a little money ! ”

"'Tisn't to be expected," answered his adviser soothingly, "that gentlemen can work and slave like poor people—'tisn't *in* them, and it's a shame you should be asked to ; but what do you propose as a shift for the present ?"

"That's what I came to you to tell me," answered Arthur. "I thought to myself that you who are acquainted with all sorts of business and money matters, might know of a good thing or two likely to suit me."

This timely little piece of flattery was not lost on Mike, who stroking his bare chin thoughtfully, answered,

"Well, you can lay against Beefeater for the Leger ; he's as good as dead, I'm told—they're only 'milking' him for the public ; or, if you like a nice little spec. in the City, the Peruvian Patent Guano Company, limited, is very good ; or the International Linen-making company pays 20 per cent. ; or the Al-

lahabad silver mines, just opened—a nice little investment, and——”

“ Oh ! I had rather not meddle with the City ; I don't understand enough of the jargon about debentures and assets, and buying for the account, or buying for a fall, or any of that. I think betting seems a good business ; my brother-in-law, Chillingworth, has talked me nearly dumb lately about his mares, and his two-year-olds, and his promising fillies, and his weight-for-ages, and ‘ platers,’ but yet it seems to me there *is* money to be made, unless one has horses oneself.”

“ Did Lord Chillingworth tell you all his stable secrets,” asked Standish eagerly ; “ because if so, we *might* do a good thing or two ? ”

“ No, no. I never asked him. Maxwell manages all that, and a nice little penny it brings him in, I'm sure ; but I don't want to be what you call a racing-man, my family

(he dared not trust himself to say his *wife*, for fear of ridicule) would not like it; and besides, I should hate grilling and slopping about on a race-course in all weathers, and taking as much exercise to back horses as if I were a prize-fighter in training. No, I should like to stay at home quietly, and just send commissions to do things for me, whenever I fancy a horse."

"I can accommodate you nicely with that," returned his friend, gaily—"I can warrant you having no trouble, and always having the best information before anyone else as to what horses are to be scratched, or which are shaky, and whether So-and-so runs for the money or not."

"You certainly are a wonderful fellow!" exclaimed Arthur, taking the cigar out of his mouth, and giving a good look at Mr. Standish, who stood the scrutiny unblushingly; "you seem to know everything, and

to be acquainted with the ins and outs of anything I ask you. I really have a mind to try your assistance for a little—I am so sick of this shilly-shallying existence, and it runs away with such a deuced lot of money, however economical I seem to be.”

“You’re not the first gentleman who has said the same to me,” answered Mike, rubbing his hand complacently over his shiny forehead, “nor the first one I’ve helped out of a scrape, by any means. The only advice I ever give to the like of you is, keep out of the hands of the Jews as long as you can. What for do you want to be filling the greasy fellows’ breeches pocket with gold and silver, when there are plenty of hard-working Britishers, like me, too glad and willing to accommodate and assist you.”

“Yes, yes,” returned Arthur, rather absently—he was thinking his friend showed an unaccountable degree of zeal for his ser-

vice, and wondered for the moment if it was all sincere.

“But what are we to put our hands to, to begin with?” asked Mr. Standish, not willing to lose so favourable a chance of doing a little business. “York races are next week, and there’ll be some money to be made there; and then there’s Doncaster, and plenty of betting on the Leger. I see The Sharper has been knocked about in the market like a soap-bubble; they’re *at* something with that horse. I’ve a friend in the stable, who always gives me the ‘tips.’ I can find out all about him, if you feel inclined that way.”

“Well, I think I must leave it to you,” said Arthur, rising—“find out all you can, and let me know what you advise, and I’ll act upon it. I shall be in London now for some time, and shall be at liberty to see you whenever you have anything to communicate.”

"Very well, sir," returned Mr. Standish, preparing to escort him as far as the door; "but I *really* wish you would think over the Allahabad silver mines; they're a wonderful paying concern; you'll see the shares will be at three premium next week, and all the shareholders will make a fortune—I *really* advise you to take a few, and buy for the account, you know, and then you can sell out directly they go up, which I'll lay my life they will in a very few days."

"Well, if you really think so, buy me a few—not too many—and keep me acquainted with the state of the Money-market."

A short good-bye, and when Arthur was fairly out of the room, and the street door had closed with a bang upon him, Mike Standish returned to his chair, and spreading himself out commodiously, tapped his knee with his sleek, fat hand, and murmur-

ed gently, while his rosy face broke out in a rainbow of smiles—

“What a comfort it is there are gentlemen in this world, penniless, ignorant wretches, who come to be taught by us as naturally as they suck their mother’s milk! Long live the gentlemen, say I! While the race of aristocrats exists, men who have brains need never fear to starve. What would become of the Jews, of the ‘Ring,’ of the gambling-tables, of myself—last, but not least—if there were no addle-headed youngsters for us to make a living out of? And to think that they should be so easily gulled!—how they believe us, the blessed darlings!—all hail to them! Now, that young specimen who has just gone out, I pity his mother; and yet it’s a fine nature running to seed—and all for want of a little ballast sometimes. I’m sorry to see it; and then I think, after all, we poor folks must

live, and if some must be the fools, and others the men who fool them, it's best to belong to the latter class, and pick up the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table."

Some little time after this conversation, Madeline had returned to London, whither an irresistible impulse led her to rejoin her husband, and Lady Chillingworth was alone in her large castle. Alone for the first time since her marriage, for the Earl and Captain Maxwell had gone to some races, and Sir Ronald's delicacy had prompted him not to risk a *tête-à-tête* with the fair Countess ; so Gertrude remained alone, free to range over the vast expanse of house and grounds, without fear of molestation. For the first time since she had been in her new position, there was no one to rouse her from her dreams, no voice to dispel her illusions ; she could come and go, sit or be silent as she pleased, and with the sense of

being left a prey to her own thoughts there came over her an intense fear and desolation. For the first time her fevered pulses beat calmly, and she looked with unutterable terror into the face of her future. Such as her life appeared now, such would it ever be. The vastness of her grandeur oppressed, and her wealth was positively loathsome to her. She could scarcely bear the sight of the gorgeous dressing-case, the diamond and ruby hoops on her fingers, the numerous wedding presents and gaudy useless knickknacks which lay about her table. To her they were emblems of her soul's slavery, links of the gilded chain she had bound herself with ; she removed all of them as far as she could, and tried, by surrounding herself with books and relics of her former life, to chase away the knowledge of her present existence, and imagine herself once again a free, innocent-hearted

girl. But the effort was in vain; her noiseless step down the vast deserted galleries startled her as it echoed in the silence; and as she glided about in her white dress, like a forsaken spirit, she could have cried aloud from sheer loneliness and fear. The delicious dream in which she had passed the last few weeks had been rudely dispelled. Sir Ronald's voice no longer sounded in her ear, and her soothed senses restored to vigour and tone gave back every emotion more acutely than before.

"Ah! why," she pondered, as she sat in her little boudoir and looked out over the far distance, plunging her sight into the blueness of the far-off hills, while the intoxicating perfume of the jessamine stole up on the evening breeze, and all nature was peaceful and smiling—"ah! why were these wild longings implanted in my breast? Why do I feel an unquenchable passion burning

within me, which never, never can be stilled ? If my life is to be this endless, cold monotony, why do I feel hopes and fears, and struggles which can only end when I shall have worn out the shell which contains this palpitating heart ? What is the use of youth and beauty, if this is to be my lot—I who used to think the universe was at my feet ? Oh ! would I were like the gay, idle creatures that flutter about the world, and find honey and happiness in every passing, frivolous amusement ; to whom the language of flattery is as sweet as the tones of love, and who are contented with the dross of the world's admiration, instead of the pure gold of tried affection ! My sister Georgina is perfectly happy in her way, and yet I suppose she has never loved, or been loved—she certainly may not have felt the anguish of rejected or misplaced affection, but then she has never known what it must be to live

and bask in the sunshine of another's devotion. I think it must be pleasant to be contented with so little, but *I* cannot; my yearning heart tells me there is better, and my passionate longing will *not* be stilled. Oh! the hateful chain of marriage, which seems so light at first, and is riven into one's very soul. It is too late—too late! I never can be happy again!"

Thus would her thoughts run as she sat alone, always recurring to the old theme, "It is too late—too late!" The sun seemed to smile upon her agony, and the hot August weather oppressed her with its bright, unsympathising glare. Even Lord Chillingworth's unwelcome presence was better than this wearisome solitude, which called up all the demons of her soul to haunt and mock at her. Gertrude pushed back the damp hair from her flushed brow, and thought impatiently that the time had never seemed so

long to her in all her life before. Suddenly, one morning, she bethought herself that she would go out; action, exercise, and the busy hum of nature, must be better than the deathlike stillness of the deserted castle, which weighed so heavily upon her spirits. So tying on her hat, and taking a parasol to shade her from the sun, she went down the steps to the terrace, and across the garden and shrubberies, out at the same little wicket gate through which she and Sir Ronald had so often strolled into the forest glades. But she did not go there, she shrank from revisiting the scenes of so many happy hours. No, she would go across the fields, and down by the brook into the village; the sounds of rural life were more welcome than her solitary grandeur. The day was lovely, the sky of a deep, untroubled blue, save where a few little fleecy clouds broke the monotony. A lazy hum and drone of insects

and butterflies sounded cheerily enough, and the vast carpet of green at Lady Chillingworth's feet was studded with the most brilliant blue, white, and yellow patches of wild flowers. Gradually the young Countess found herself more in harmony with all things around her, and stopped now and then to gaze, and inhale with pleasure the fresh, balmy breeze which gently fanned her cheek, and played coyly amongst her hair. Her path now led out of the meadows over a stile by the side of a babbling stream, where the scenery was of a wilder character; drooping alder and willow-trees dipped their branches into the clear, dancing water, and broken bits of rock and clumps of ferns sloped down to the edge. Here and there the sun glittered with a silver sparkle upon the trout that jumped to catch the flies and insects hovering over the stream, while deeper pools gave back the cool reflection of the

banks and waterfalls, whose tangled masses of deep dark green formed a grateful rest to the eye. That dancing, babbling brook came from the far-off hills, where it had its origin probably in a tiny crystal rill, trickling from the crevice of a rock, and now growing in volume as it proceeded joyously, wound its noisy way to where, at last, with a little faint murmur, it merged its wavelets into the dull flow of the muddy river.

To Lady Chillingworth's fancy there was a strange similitude between her fate and that of this little brook, both starting in life so fair, so fresh, both full of youth and vigour, and both rushing with blind impetuosity to bury their existence in the dull, stagnant flow of a deadening life. Once more the sad thoughts returned to cloud the brow of the young Countess, but quickening her steps, she determined to continue her walk, and distract herself by a visit to the clergyman's wife.

The little village of Silton had always been a model one. The fine ladies from the castle had visited the schools, and instructed the children, and lectured and relieved the parents ; and to the simple minds of the cottagers, who had lived an untroubled existence upon the estate for generations, and known no variety or wishes beyond what their fathers had enjoyed before them, the sight of "the lady from the Castle" was as welcome and as looked for as the passage of a queen. Many had been the speculations about the new Countess, whom they had as yet only seen when she arrived ; and the whole population turning out in their holiday clothes, with cheers and garlands, and unharnessing the horses of the carriage, had drawn the happy couple with their own hands to the threshold of their magnificent abode ; and the young "maister's" choice, and the beauty of his lady, had proved a

fruitful theme for the old crones over their tea, or the sturdy labourers as they refreshed on Sunday with a pot of ale and their pipes at the village public. But they had not yet seen the Countess amongst themselves; they had not yet spoken to her, or heard more than the few graceful words with which she thanked them for their kind, spontaneous welcome; and already the old gossips whispered amongst themselves that things were changed since the days of the old Earl and Countess, and that his lordship, though, "bless his heart, he were of the real old blood," did not seem to care as much for the interests of the village as they had been used to. Now, when the news spread like wildfire that the Countess herself was walking quite simple like through the hamlet, children rushed to the doors to drop their little curtesy, and mothers, hastily tidying themselves, advanced

to get a good view ; while decrepit old men, and those who were past work, hobbled to the seat placed in the sun before the cottages, to catch a sight and murmur a blessing upon the woman whose husband in times gone by they had dandled upon their now enfeebled knees.

Gertrude wondered when she saw the numberless faces that peered from all the cottages—she had never witnessed the sort of patriarchal devotion these people bore their ancient masters. She could not help stopping to talk to a rosy-cheeked urchin of some three years old, whose fond mother's quick hands had cleaned and tidied him at the first news of her approach, and who stood with a stare of happy wonder at the garden gate, pulling his curly locks in village salutation. The little fellow was monstrously pleased at Gertrude's notice, and to her question whose was the neat

prettily surrounded with evergreens and laurels, and tall lilac and laburnum bushes, which were a perfect wilderness of blossom in the spring, and the small grass plot in front of the drawing-room, carefully mowed, was yet one cluster of white daisies. Lady Chillingworth thought how sweet a spot, and yet how dull to dwell in such small limits all one's life! What did people think of, she wondered, whose sphere was so narrow—so contracted?

At this moment the door was opened by a small, pale, fair woman of about two-and-thirty, in a faded lilac cotton, but yet who was, notwithstanding the shabbiness of her appearance, unmistakably a lady. She looked shyly and uncomfortably at Gertrude, who said, reassuringly, "Is Mrs. Bloss at home?"

"Pray step in," answered the little woman, showing the way to the small, low

drawing-room, and in her confusion nearly passing in front of the visitor, who, pitying her, said, as she seated herself near the window—

“I daresay you do not know me—I am Lady Chillingworth, and thought I should like to pay you a visit, as we live so very close. I hope I have not disturbed you?”

“Oh! dear, no,” answered the little woman, turning the colour of a ripe peach, as she perceived at last who her visitor was. “Sarah is washing to-day, and I have to do most of the house-work myself, so you must please excuse my dress;” and she looked ruefully at her faded cotton, which did not show to advantage beside Lady Chillingworth’s spotless white muslin.

An awkward pause now ensued, when suddenly, with a bang that made Gertrude start, the drawing-room door burst open, and a big, overgrown boy of ten years old,

in a dirty brown holland blouse, his hands black and soiled, rushed in, with large tears coursing down his grimy cheeks, scarred with many cuts and scratches, and roared out, not seeing the visitor—

“ Oh ! mammy, mammy, I'd just got such a fine big worm to put on my fishing-rod, and that nasty Sarah snatched it from me, and put it over the wall, and said I was a cruel, naughty boy ! Do tell her I may have the worms ! ”

The unfortunate Mrs. Bloss, whose tender pet had just presented itself under such disadvantageous circumstances, coloured more violently still, and only with some force, and after a good deal of persuasion, managed to secure his retreat from the room, while he was still screaming anathemas on Sarah. When Mrs. Bloss returned, redder and more discomposed than ever, Lady Chillingworth asked—

"That is your eldest boy, I presume?"

"Oh! yes," said the mother, in a despairing tone—"the eldest of eight."

"Eight!" echoed Lady Chillingworth, with an accent of surprise.

"Yes, I have had ten children, and two are dead, poor little things!—they are buried in that churchyard." With which affecting recollection Mrs. Bloss wiped away a tear.

"You must find eight children give you a great deal of trouble. I wonder you do not send that fine little fellow to school," continued her visitor.

"Oh!" returned Mrs. Bloss, now much more at her ease, "poor little darling, he is *so* delicate, and at school they would never look after him, or see he changed his shoes; you have no idea, Lady Chillingworth, the anxiety children are, they are always catching cold, or having the measles and hooping-cough, or cutting their fingers.

"Indeed," answered Gertrude sympathizingly. "I should think they were; but I suppose your servants assist you?"

"Well, maidservants are so careless; there was Eliza I had last year, she let little Fanny tumble into a pail of scalding water; and Jane, she spoilt all the plums I had intended to make into jam, and Sarah——"

Lady Chillingworth, afraid she was going to have the whole history of Mrs. Bloss's servants, here interrupted her by saying,

"This is a charming little spot! you must be very happy here, and I should think it was very healthy."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Mrs. Bloss plaintively; "the cholera was here last year, and I always have the neuralgia in my head, and the house is very damp with all those creepers about it. I liked the sea place we were at before much better; but Mr. Bloss thought this a better living, so we

came here. I think John likes it pretty well."

Gertrude wondered in her heart what sort of person John was, and how he stood the whiney ways of his wife. She was not long in uncertainty, for he shortly came in, and she was agreeably surprised in him; he was tall, gentlemanlike-looking, with a broad open brow, and a kind, cheerful manner. Gertrude felt at home with him directly, and was not sorry when Mrs. Bloss retired to see after some tea, and left her to chat with the clergyman. He was pleasant and well-informed, and the time passed quickly, till Mrs. Bloss returned, and with crestfallen countenance, announced that there was no milk in the house, so they could not have any tea.

"Why did not you keep some from this morning?" mildly asked her husband.

Poor Mrs. Bloss, with tears in her eyes, answered,

"The children gave it to the kitten, and the girl's not yet come in with the fresh milk. I'm sure I've told her often not to be so late; but she doesn't mind what she is told."

Mr. Bloss shrugged his shoulders as if accustomed to these little *contretemps*, and Lady Chillingworth saying, "It does not signify the least, I assure you," prepared to take her departure.

With a sigh of relief Gertrude once more re-entered the castle, and seating herself luxuriously in an arm-chair in her own dainty boudoir, thought to herself that after all there were some things harder to bear than an indifferent husband, and rejoiced that she was not called upon to live for ever with peevish Mrs. Bloss, her eight children, and shiftless, untidy household.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next day Lady Chillingworth received a letter from her mother, saying that in a few days, if convenient, she would come and pay her a visit, as she was anxious to see her home, and the surroundings of her darling Gertrude; and that as Georgina shared the wish, she hoped to accompany her. Gertrude curled her lips scornfully, as, finishing this epistle, she crumpled it up and threw it into the waste-paper basket, saying to herself as she did so,

“It is wonderful how fond they are of me, now that I am well married and independent. However, let them come, it will be a diversion, anyhow, from this unbearable solitude.”

So she wrote a favourable answer, and counted the days till Lord Chillingworth's return. He was not long away, only about a week, but Gertrude felt quite glad to see him, and came out to receive him and Captain Maxwell with an unusually cordial welcome. Lord Chillingworth, hot and dusty, with his well-worn shooting-coat and red, perspiring face, did not look an inviting object; but Gertrude's new-born ardour overlooked the accessories, and she smiled kindly at him as she helped him off with his travel-stained garment. He gave her one smack with his great lips on her forehead—the identical smack that in the first days of her marriage used to call up such blushes; then he exclaimed, in his loud, cheery tones,

“Well, my lady, and how are you? Maxwell and I are desperately hungry, we have had nothing but a biscuit and a glass of sherry since we started this morning. Let's

have the bill of fare, and see what we're to have for dinner. Ring the bell, Maxwell, there's a good fellow."

His faithful aide-de-camp obeyed promptly, and with an unusual feeling of deference to Lady Chillingworth's evident wishes, left the room.

"Confound the fellow, he's gone!" exclaimed the Earl, as he perceived the desertion. "What can have become of him? Well, Gertrude, we were very lucky—we won several races. I told Maxwell that little mare Eavesdropper would prove a good one; and so she did, she won the Cup in a common canter. And how have you amused yourself? I suppose capitally. Women always get on well with their stitching and their fiddle-faddles! Oh! Jones," this to the solemn, grey-haired butler, who had answered the bell, "bring the bill of fare; and look here, ask Captain Maxwell to come

down—I want to stroll down to the kennels with him.”

All this while Gertrude sat by pale and silent; not a word of tender sympathy, not an expression of pleasure at having returned, or word of having missed her—his first thought, the same as his last, interest and anxiety about his horses and his dogs. Lady Chillingworth pressed back a tear as she said calmly,

“Mamma and Georgina have proposed themselves here—they talk of coming the day after to-morrow.”

“All right,” answered the Earl, gaily, “I shall be glad to see them; by all means fill the house with your women-folks, if they amuse you. *I* shan’t trouble them much; besides, I daresay I may go away next week for a few days. Maxwell wants me to go to a sale of yearlings he says are very fine.”

Lady Chillingworth had risen, and was

standing by the window in an attitude of depression, when the Captain re-entered, while the Earl was happily looking over the contents of his betting-book. Even to Maxwell's ignorant eyes he saw something was amiss ; but, with his usual discretion, he forbore to make any remark.

“ Perhaps she is jealous of my influence,” he thought ; “ but she doesn't care about him, and what can there be in common between her and an empty-headed lout like that ? She ought to be much obliged to me for keeping him out of her way while she indulges in her quiet little flirtations. But the sex is unreasonable. I'll give her a hint some day, if I remember.”

His further reflections were interrupted by Lord Chillingworth's eager entreaties to “ come along, that we may see the dogs before it's too dark ;” and they sallied forth, leaving Gertrude alone.

When she descended for dinner, in her fresh white demi-toilette, with one real blush rose in her hair (she had employed a little innocent coquetry to look as well as she could to-night), the polite Jones informed her "that his lordship wasn't returned from the hounds, and that the cook he's afraid the dinner will be sp'iled, as there's his lordship's fav'rite turtle soup, my lady, and water souchet; and please, shall he put it off for a quarter of an hour?"

"Oh! yes, Jones, certainly," said Gertrude, taking a book and seating herself patiently near the window, to await his lordship's good pleasure. In less than a quarter of an hour in they came, tramping breathlessly along, bringing into the dainty drawing-room a smell of horses and sundry seeds and bits of straw that clung to their feet; and, with an expression of surprise at her being ready, Lord Chillingworth said,

"Oh! I'll be down in no time—just wash my hands and face. You won't mind our dressing, as there's only ourselves. Don't you dress either, Maxwell; it's such a relief to be rid of the bother—and we mustn't keep the turtle soup waiting!"

But Captain Maxwell *did* dress, though the Earl came down complacently in his self-same shooting suit, and clapping him jovially on the back, rallied him on what he was pleased to call his "woman's way." When Lord Chillingworth had satisfied his ravenous hunger, he turned to his wife, and said in an indifferent tone,

"By-the-bye, we met that fellow Minton to-day at the station; he sends you all sorts of messages, and I told him if he was in the neighbourhood he might as well come back here and stay a little, as we were dull by ourselves."

At this remark, thrown out at random,

Gertrude, who had sat trifling with the wing of a grouse, her thoughts far away, started as if a thunderbolt had fallen at her feet; a rosy colour came into her cheeks, while her eyes shone brightly for a moment, and then drooped shyly, and her face became deadly white; her hand trembled as she laid down her fork, and tried to ask unconcernedly, "Do you mean Sir Ronald Minton? *Is* he coming back?"

"Well, to tell you the truth," answered Lord Chillingworth, "I almost forget exactly what he did say. Maxwell, what did Minton say?—can you remember?"

"I think he said he should come on Thursday, as you were kind enough to ask him," said Maxwell, who was carefully disjoining a wild duck.

"Thursday," thought Gertrude; "and to-day is Monday—only two more days? I may expect him, then?" she asked aloud;

while the Earl heeded not her question—he was deep in a sporting discussion with Maxwell, who always argued to give a zest to the conversation, and ended by coming round completely to the Earl's opinion, which pleased him amazingly.

The two days passed slowly by, but at last they were over, and Sir Ronald arrived, looking so delighted and happy as he pressed Lady Chillingworth's hand, and answered her cordial greeting, as to have pleased the most jealous woman. Gertrude regretted now bitterly that her mother and sister were coming to interrupt the sweet *tête-à-tête* she saw before her; but not a thought of danger or doubt passed through her mind. Like a flower in the absence of her sun, she had sickened and pined; now, like a flower, she raised her drooping head, and expanded the graceful leaves of her mind, to be vivified and irradiated by his presence. She

was so utterly alone, so neglected, who could blame her for seeking the society in which she found happiness? Must not the parched earth drink in with fond delight the cool drops that fall from heaven upon its weary bosom? Gertrude, in her short life, had seen such sickening sights of the vanity and emptiness of the world's show and glitter—her feelings, her better woman's nature, had been so pent up within herself, that her heart had grown old and seared, and now suddenly the golden flowers of hope had sprung up, and she was reaping a harvest of happiness and love. Love!—that word she had so often scorned, whose existence she had utterly denied; love in its most agonizing and yet most entrancing vision—impossible, forbidden love, was revealed to her in all its tempting, treacherous beauty. Gertrude, in a quiet, peaceful house, where gentle affection had ruled over her, would

probably never have known passion in its wildest, most ungovernable form ; but cast adrift upon the world, without an anchor for her soul, she was thrown, high and dry, stranded upon the quicksands, and the fatality of events had driven her whither probably her own intentions would never have led her. Once more Sir Ronald's powerful charm of manner cast its spell over her—once more her senses, spell-bound, hugged the chains she was henceforth doomed to wear ; a willing captive she had thrown herself at her master's feet, and his will could crush her as she lay, or bid her live his prisoner still. Like the faithful dog that licks the hand uplifted in chastisement against him, she kissed the rod that flayed her, and hailed with rapture the iron that entered into her soul. And Sir Ronald saw the wonderful progress he had made in his absence—he felt that the die was cast, and

it was now too late to recede. This beautiful woman, with her soul quivering with love, her spirit new-born with ecstasy, was his to damn or to save in his man's strength. For one moment he shrank appalled, as he saw his power; then, with the hardness of his sex, he determined to use it, be the consequences what they might.

There was bustle and animation in the old castle of Chillingworth. Doors were opened and shut, and the heavy tread of servants re-echoed through the long oaken galleries, with the rustle of ladiesmaids' gowns, while their shrill tones were heard asking which was their mistress's rooms, and urging care in moving sundry valuable bonnet-boxes and dressing-cases. Lady Caroline Dormer had arrived, accompanied by innumerable packages and cases of luggage, and by her eldest daughter, Mrs. Fortescue, who was nothing loath to leave her barris-

ter husband, and her London house, with all its cares and worries, behind her. Gertrude had taken a pride in giving them the best accommodation the house offered, and had had prepared for them a charming suite of rooms, called the "King's Rooms," from some legend which asserted that they had once been used by King Charles I. ; and, indeed, as regarded their antiquity, they might almost have been used by William the Conqueror.

The rooms were high and lofty, and the walls were covered with specimens of curious old tapestry, which had preserved its colour marvellously, so that Dianas, hunters, gods, and goddesses looked ready to walk out from the canvas, and mingle with the inhabitants of the chamber. Fine old crimson damask hangings shaded the oriel windows, in which were crimson velvet seats, which invited to repose ; and the antique-carved oak bed, with quaint figures and devices, was

dressed with the same rich stuff, while all the furniture was composed of carved oak, the dressing and toilet things, and a curious casket for jewels, being of massive silver. All this, it was said, had been used by King Charles ; and, indeed, there was a perfume of antique respectability about these apartments which impressed you on entering.

Georgina Fortescue, with her half envious, half discontented manner, spied out the beauties of these rooms in the course of a few minutes ; and as she stood at the deep window, through which the setting sun streamed with a reddish gleam, she could not forbear exclaiming,

“ Dear me, Gertrude, I had no idea this place was half so fine. What a lucky woman you are, to be sure ; and I don’t believe,” she added, casting a reproachful look at her sister, “ that you half appreciate it, or care for this lovely old castle one bit.”

"Oh! yes, I do," answered Gertrude deprecatingly, as her eyes followed Georgina's down to the rose gardens, where the figure of Sir Ronald Minton might be seen passing slowly along—"oh! yes, I appreciate it all; but it's a gloomy place to be in by one's self?"

"But who ever thought of being here alone," exclaimed Georgina briskly. "I should have perpetual parties and balls, and Christmas festivities, and pic-nics at this time of the year, and a dance every evening in that nice old gallery. It's a charming floor; I tried it as I came along. Oh! what wouldn't I give to be you, Gertrude, as rich as a queen, and everything you can wish for at your elbow! While I married a stuffy lawyer, who had nothing but a dull house in London, and sits over his musty briefs all day!"

"But," said Gertrude gently, "he has made himself a name, and earned a fortune, all through his own talent and perseverance.

You ought to respect him extremely, and be very proud of him."

"Proud!—fiddlesticks!—pride won't give one gowns from Descou, or bonnets from Paris. *I* like the tangible—something I can touch, and look at, and say, 'There, that's mine!' Oh! Gertrude, *do* look at that darling silver inkstand, with the queer little satyr at the top! Mamma, isn't that a pretty looking-glass?—and all silver, too!"

Lady Caroline was sitting in front of the said looking-glass, arranging her glossy black hair and her coquettish little hat, for she liked to look young and interesting, and always wore a hat in travelling.

"If you ask me," said Lady Caroline, sharply, "the glass is shocking. I look bright yellow, and at least ten years older in it. Why don't you get a proper modern looking-glass, Gertrude, instead of this old tin thing?"

"I will order one to be put here," replied the young Countess, meekly ; while Georgina made a face behind her mother's back, and fluttered off to examine everything else.

As the ladies sat, after dinner, during the period in which all their friends and neighbours are discussed, and characters are blasted and lost between the sips of a cup of tea, Georgina turned suddenly to her sister, who was fondling a beautiful little white Spitz-dog, and exclaimed—

"Who gave you that dog, Gertrude?—I never saw it before."

At this question Lady Chillingworth blushed so extremely, that her face, neck, and shoulders became a brilliant crimson, and answered, confusedly—

"Oh! did I not tell you? It was Sir Ronald Minton; he brought it me the other day."

"He seems very attentive to you," re-

marked Georgina, pointedly. "How sly you were to get such a good-looking young man to come and stay down in the country with you, and not another lady in the house! I believe, too, he has been here for weeks."

"Madeline was here," answered Gertrude, stooping over the dog, who was gracefully coiled at her side, while she strove to hide her blushes.

"Well, but he came back again after she went away," continued her tormentor, reflectively; "he's very good-looking, and I suppose he's very rich. How much do you think he has?"

"I am sure I can't say," answered poor Gertrude—"perhaps, if you ask him, he will tell you."

"Nonsense, child; but I suppose, now, he's a sort of man who does not care a fig about money. I should think he would

give one lots of bouquets, and opera-boxes, and that sort of thing. Did he ever give you any, Gertrude?"

"No," said she, raising her head proudly—"I never accept favours from young men."

"Hm!" retorted her sister—"witness the dog."

Gertrude might have answered sharply, had not Lady Caroline interposed with—

"By-the-bye, Gertrude, how came you to have Mrs. Dormer here? I really cannot understand your infatuation for that flaring, vulgar upstart—after her history, too, and doubtful antecedents. She is not fit for a lady to associate with, particularly in your position."

"She is my brother's wife," answered Gertrude, quietly.

"Well, let *him* be burdened with her society. I don't really see why the family should suffer for his sins; he married her,

and he must keep her. *I* never mean to see her again, and he knows better than to bring her to *my* house."

"Arthur is very fond of her," resumed Lady Chillingworth, "and I think it an insult to him to treat her badly. Besides, she is a very nice creature."

"For my part," exclaimed Lady Caroline, tossing her head, "I hate 'parvenues,' and anyone whose history is *doubtful*. I dare say she's a very good sort of person, fit for a governess, or that kind of thing, and could sit as a model to Arthur. If he was wise, he could keep her at home in the capacity of a lady housekeeper, to make up his bills, and bake pies and puddings, and mend his clothes."

"I am afraid Arthur is very poor," put in Gertrude, gently. "Couldn't papa——"

"Oh! if you mean we ought to increase his allowance," broke out her mother, ve-

hemently, "I have recommended Mr. Dormer to do no such thing, we have quite enough to do with our money as it is. *You* may provide for him if you like. By-the-bye, where did you get those large Indian vases? I want some like them. That man is so slow in buying me curiosities and china, and Indian things are quite the fashion now. Lady Everard told me she bought nothing else, and she is a wonderful judge."

Now that Lady Caroline and her sister were with her, there was no chance of a *tête-à-tête* between Gertrude and Sir Ronald, for all day he was shooting, or with the other gentlemen; and if by chance he stayed at home, Georgina contrived to monopolize him, or, at any rate, to be a party to his conversation with her sister. But to Lady Chillingworth there was music in the mere sound of his voice, there was happiness in the sight of his countenance, and if occasion-

ally his deep blue eyes rested for a moment upon her, it caused a thrill of untold ecstasy to run through her veins. One afternoon in September, Lady Caroline and Georgina expressed their determination of not going out beyond the garden—it was too hot, they said, and where was the use? Gertrude, nothing loth to be alone, ordered her horse, and started for a ride, accompanied by a servant. The gentlemen were shooting at some distance on the moors, and she thought it would be pleasant to ride in that direction, and perhaps meet them coming home. Gertrude was very fond of riding, and a great proficient in the exercise; the consequence was that she looked exceedingly well on horseback, her slight, fairy-like figure bending naturally and easily to the horse's paces. Many were the glances of admiration that would follow her as she cantered up Rotten Row, but she far preferred a

gallop at her ease along a country lane, than to be the centre of the most approving crowd in London. Thus to-day she cantered on far away out into the wild moor, where there was not a sign or sound of human life, and where the air felt fresh and pure. Gertrude lifted her head and drew in a long, deep breath. The silence of nature did her good, and she reined up her horse, and let him walk slowly at his pleasure, while she marked the blue and purple tints on the hills, which looked as soft as velvet, and the deep orange and brown patches amongst the heather, or listened to the quiet trickle of the mountain stream. At that moment a strange happiness and peace came over her soul; no thought of the future or the past oppressed her with its weight, the faint odour of the blue-bell and the heather seemed to speak to her of love, the stream gurgled forth in tones of joy the same un-

ending strain, while golden butterflies hovered over her head, and all, to her dreaming fancy, seemed redolent of happiness. Gertrude clasped her hands, and looking upwards to the smiling heavens, uttered a silent prayer that she, too, might be happy, as all nature was.

Slowly and thoughtfully she retraced her steps. The sun was low in the heavens, the day was already far spent, and the rosy tints of sunset had succeeded to the noon-day glare. Gertrude was about to hasten homewards, when the sound of wheels startled her from her reverie, and she beheld a brake with two horses, containing the gentlemen of their party. They stopped as they recognised her, and Sir Ronald, seeing her alone, offered to ride home with her. Before she could utter a word, Lord Chillingworth had advocated the suggestion, and ordered the groom to dismount and give his

horse to Sir Ronald, while he himself returned on the box of the brake. The servant, who had already chafed at his mistress's long ride, jumped off eagerly, hailing the possibility of returning rather sooner to his tea and his quiet pipe. So before Gertrude could object, the brake had driven off again, and she and Sir Ronald were alone. They rode along silently enough at first—it was their first free interview for some time past, and both were slightly embarrassed. Sir Ronald commenced with some indifferent topic, and, once started, words flowed easily enough. Suddenly he said, as he rode quite close to her, and his hand played with the bridle of her horse,

“Do you know, I have been so happy here ; but I am afraid it must all end, and I must go.”

Gertrude's lips quivered, and her expression changed abruptly, as she asked curiously,

"Why must you go? Oh! Sir Ronald, what have I said?"

"Nothing, dear Lady Chillingworth—nothing, but—I cannot stay." He gazed fixedly at her as he spoke, as if to read her thoughts; but she looked down, and he could perceive nothing save the same quivering of the lip. Her attitude was inexpressibly graceful and resigned as she sat upon her horse, her head drooped slightly forward, her long lashes veiling her eyes chastely. There was something of childlike innocence about her that would have touched most men, as at last she raised her eyes and asked, half shyly, half tearfully, "Why must you go?"

His eye flashed, he cast upon her a glance of fiery longing as he answered,

"Why must I go? Can you not guess?—is it not revealed clearly enough in all my words and tones?—do you not know that

there is a moment when the pent-up stream must burst forth?—can you expect a man to live in daily, hourly contact with one like you, and not understand that the fire must at last become unquenchable? Oh! Gertrude, it may be sport to you, but it is death to me! Women, I suppose, have cold and governable feelings. Because they happen to be tied to a man by one word from a priest's lips, they crush all other thoughts—they shut their eyes to the devotion which is there at their feet, and simply wait for the legal love which probably never is theirs. Gertrude, my love, my adoration for you is killing me—it is ruining me soul and body! This must come to an end, as you please—your word shall be my law; but I will not endure this any longer!”

He paused; Gertrude did not answer, her head was still bent down, but he thought he saw a tear quivering, like a dewdrop, on

her long silken lashes. They had reached the long chestnut avenue, which stretched up to the house. The massive branches of the fine old trees formed a vaulted arch, like the aisles of a church, over their heads ; the horse's hoofs made no sound while they trod the velvety turf of the ride, and long rays of the setting sun lit it up like an emerald carpet. The air was so still, you could have heard the buzzing of the smallest insect, and close at Gertrude's ear was the fevered, ardent pleading of the soft voice she loved, alas ! too well. Sir Ronald swung himself from his horse, and walked with hasty steps beside Gertrude's saddle; his eyes, upturned, sought hers.

"My own, my darling!" he murmured, as he passed his arm around her waist, supporting her frail figure, as it drooped like a lily before the storm.

Her head rested on his shoulder, his

hand took hers, which lay passive and unresisting. She was beautiful, thus in her half shy, half pleading innocence—the delicate flush mantling her cheek. Her expression said as plain as words could tell, “You see your power; you see what you can do with me; but spare—oh! spare my weakness.”

Sir Ronald thought he had conquered; his victory had been an easy one, and he triumphantly pressed her closer to him, as if she were his undisputed property. Suddenly her consciousness, which seemed to have been for a moment lulled, returned; she shook herself free of him, and for the first time since his change of tone she looked him proudly, defiantly straight in the face.

“Sir Ronald,” she said, “remember who I am!”

For an instant abashed at this unexpected resistance, Sir Ronald soon recovered his composure, and said in pleading tones,

“ Oh ! Gertrude, it is because I *do* remember who you are that I speak thus—it is because I know that you belong, in the world's eyes, to a man who does not care for you more than for his dog ; because I know that you are alone, neglected ; because I hate the titled idiot who dares to sully those pure lips with his profane embraces, whose coarse hand presumes to dally in that silken hair and press in careless ignorance that dainty form ; it is because I am *jealous* of you, Gertrude—jealous even of your *husband*, who neglects the loving offices I would give my life to dare to offer you, who turns heedlessly from the charms that are to me divine, and tramples under foot the heart whose lightest sigh to me is ecstasy. It is because I *love* you, Gertrude, with a love such as you have never known, such as your pure maiden heart has no conception of ; it is because I
that I can supply the want of your life,

remove the burden of your existence, that I speak thus. Do you think I have not watched you? Do you think I do not see that title and riches are nothing to you, and that your soul, your affections are panting for food? Some women might be happy in your position, but you are not. Do not seek to deny—I *know* it, Gertrude. Be mine, be my life, my idol! I will watch over you as the mother tends her first-born child; I will avert from your path all the thorns and brambles; I will bear your cares, and take all the weariness and toil upon myself. Oh! my love, my darling, do not cast your fate from you, it comes but once in our lives, and who knows but this may be the turning-point!"

She had turned away her head, but still sat motionless, listening. At last she spoke—her voice was broken, feeble as she murmured, "Do not tempt me—have pity, as you are strong!"

She had never said she loved him, she had not responded one passionate word, and yet those two knew that their hearts beat in unison, and that they were like to break. On his part it was the strong unbridled love of passionate manhood ; on hers it was the first awakening from the torpor of her virgin soul. Though married, she had never known one thrill of passion, one thought of love—she was as unconscious, dreaming as a child ; but now womanhood and knowledge had come together, and the first draft of happiness was mixed with bitter gall. Sir Ronald still held her hand, though she had extricated herself from his embrace ; and in hoarse tones, suppressed and low from the violence of passion, he continued—

“ We are both of us so young, Gertrude ! Oh ! let us not throw away our life—let us not bind ourselves with iron chains, which will drag us down to the grave ! I am rich,

I am independent—I am ready to dedicate my life to you! And can you cast me from you, when you know both our fates will be but endless misery? What will *he* care, that cold, heartless brute who calls you his, and can no more appreciate your perfections than the stag grazing yonder (indeed, *that* is the nobler animal—*he* fights for the possession of the hind, and gains her by force of courage)—what will he care, I say, if you leave him—he who made your life a misery to you while you remained; and the world—well, when we are far away in the sunny smiling South, alone with our love, what shall we care for *its* verdict? Gertrude, you tremble; say yes, darling, and let it be for all eternity!"

She was trembling, but she was not wavering; her spirit was broken, but her resolve had never been firmer.

"No, no!" she cried, "not this; happi-

ness begun in crime would be no happiness to me. Oh! would it were possible!—would I might once taste such wonderful, such heavenly bliss, and then that I might die! But no, Ronald, it may—it dare not be! One glimpse of perfect happiness has been revealed to me, and now the clouds have gathered, and I must return to the darkness of earth. Life is over for me, but my duties still exist, and nothing shall tempt me to forsake them. I thank you for your words of love—they have done my thirsty soul good. I know now what life *might* have been, but it is too late. We must part, and we must both go our separate ways, and find peace as best we can. God knows how I have loved you; God knows it will be weary work—but His will be done!”

The last words were almost inaudible; sobs—great heaving sobs—choked her ut-

terance; the teardrops forced themselves through her fingers as she sought to stay their course; and Sir Ronald's bosom heaved with agony as he remembered that he had called them forth in his vain, selfish passion. They had nearly reached the door; time was flying fast—this might be their last interview, and they had still so much to say. Sir Ronald could have cursed himself for his folly—he had cut the last branch from under him; he must now go, when even the hitherto unsatisfactory state of things had been preferable to absence.

“Gertrude,” he said, “rouse yourself—we have but few more moments to be together. Let me hear you say again you love me—turn your eyes this way—let me hear your soft voice once again.”

Mechanically she dried her eyes; she turned her resigned, ashy face towards him. In that moment of supreme agony she had

aged ten years ; he was shocked as her pale trembling lips essayed to form the words, " My Ronald ! " At last he took her wildly in his arms ; he gazed into her eyes, and gave her several burning kisses, which seemed to sear her lips and forehead as they fell ; then, letting her go as quickly as he had seized her, he exclaimed, " And now to hell with all the rest ! " He sprang upon his horse, and spurred wildly on, leaving her with her head drooped, as she had fallen from his embrace. Gertrude's eyes were dry, her mouth was parched, but her gait was firm and dignified, as the servant lifted her from her horse on to the broad flight of steps. Unconsciously she held her head erect, and passed on with unfaltering step till she reached the threshold of her room ; and there, as the sense of her desolation came over her, she uttered one faint cry, and sank insensible on the ground.

CHAPTER XIV.

M ADELINE DORMER was once more at "home" in the quiet back dining-room in Mansfield Street—the home which she had chosen for herself when she left her sunny, smiling plains of Italy for a dingy house in London—when she elected to leave her mother and the cradle of her youth to follow the steps of a stranger. Very different from Gertrude, the fate she had embraced she clung to with tenacity, and in proportion as she saw the difficulties of her path, her devotion to her husband increased. The pious enthusiasm of her malleable nature had been kindled into flames; the first object of its worship had engrossed all other feelings—all other devo-

tions, and, true to the teachings of her youth, through the earthly love she looked upward to the spiritual. The Holy Virgin seemed to her to smile upon her efforts ; the saints, whose succour she invoked, were partners to her toil. Had her lot led her to the convent walls, she would have been one of those ascetic enthusiasts who passed their lives in alternate self-chastisement and prayer. Martyrdom would have been hailed as a crown of glory, and life itself would have been but one step towards eternity.

In Madeline's love for Arthur there was nothing sensual, nothing of earthly passion ; it was an adoration, but such a one as savoured more of self-abnegation than of fleshly indulgence. He was her idol, and her daily prayer was that she might save him from harm, and live to repay his boundless generosity. In her intense humility, it almost seemed to her as if he had stooped to

raise her from the mire in which her mother's sin had laid her ; and the condescending graciousness of this act was to her mind like the bounty of the Creator to the created. If by her striving—if by her prayers—if by her tears she could work for him a place in heaven—in *her* heaven—the heaven of her priests and of her Virgin—then, indeed, she had attained her aim, and she would exclaim in ecstasy, “Lord, now let Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation !” For Madeline could no more comprehend a man risking his future salvation for the pleasures of earth, than she could have credited a drowning man refusing the hand held out to save him.

Day by day her love became purer and more heavenly ; day by day the expression of her face became more spiritual, her large eyes, no longer full of the light of passion,

glowed with enthusiasm and devotion far more entrancing. If it be asked how Arthur, essentially a man of the world, made his lax ideas of duty and of self-denial accord with the stern creed of his wife, it must be said that he never imparted to her any of his schemes of self-aggrandisement and money-making—or, indeed, troubled her with much of his company; and that she, though rigid in her own behalf, was indulgent as a mother to all his fancies, and almost loved his peccadilloes, from the fact that they were his. Thus from his wife no warning reached him, no gentle rebuke incited him to pause. If he had made her suffer ever so deeply, she would have devoured her tears in silence, and rejoiced that it was given to her to show her love by such divine forbearance. And now was exemplified in Madeline the evils of that religion which teaches to do evil that good may come—which subjugates the will

to another, and that a human and fallible power. The priest's influence over Madeline was increased, not lessened, by the circumstances in which she was placed, and the obedience she rendered him was more implicit than ever. He fostered her mystical tendencies, he encouraged her intense humility and almost morbid sensibility; he preached patience, and resignation, and non-interference with her husband's wishes, to further his own plans, but (as he told her) to wean him, by the force of her gentle example, into the paths of orthodoxy. Meanwhile the poor child was constantly haunted by the thought that it was through her own unworthiness, through her own want of faith, that the desired consummation failed; in which error the priest encouraged her.

The summer was passing away, and merging into autumn; the dull chill of winter began to make itself felt in London, where the

twilight always comes quicker than elsewhere, and the rainy, murky atmosphere had a tendency to encourage gloomy thoughts, and keep them in a brooding, desponding channel. Save when Madeline was in a religious ecstasy, she was inclined to melancholy—the influence of the climate, and disturbing thoughts of sin and remorse, had produced this effect upon her. She scarcely ever walked or took exercise, which in itself was most injurious to her health, after the free out-door life she had led in Italy, where the fresh sea-breezes had been her food, and the aromatic, thymy-scented air from the hills had blown all despondency away; but in the evenings, when the dim daylight was waning, and a misty damp filled the air, Madeline would go abroad into the streets, and wander aimlessly along, weaving fancies in her head, which consorted with the shadowy uncertainty of the forms

that met her eye, and the turmoil of emotions that filled her fevered brain. On these occasions many a passer-by would stop and gaze at the fair young form that walked unconsciously along, and wonder if she had no husband or brother to watch over her, and shield her steps from harm. And at times, when the sudden glare of gaslights burst upon her gaze, or a thick throng of people impeded her path, Madeline would start, and, with the look of a frightened fawn, discover where she was, and hastily turn homewards. Her time was so much her own to do as she liked, that the hours in which she had been used to the bright companionship of Nature often hung heavy on her hands, and of these great part were spent in the offices of religion. She never missed an early mass, and often went again, on fasts or holidays, to the mass at midday.

It was the feast of St. Luke. The doors

of a cathedral were wide open, and through them streamed a crowd of people, anxious to be in time for the service. The solemn tones of the organ pealed grandly out, and the bright light of day mixed strangely with the vapoury, subdued atmosphere of the interior, as a few rays of sun stole in through the open doors, and gilded the pictures of saints, or played for a moment upon the top of a bright brass candlestick. Amongst the crowd had glided in unobserved a woman dressed in black, with a thick veil over her face. She stopped not to gaze right or left, as did many of the other worshippers, but hastily sprinkling herself with some of the holy water, she hurried on till she came to a chapel and shrine specially dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In honour of the day, it was profusely ornamented with flowers and garlands, brought by devout members of the congregation; but it was comparatively de-



sented, as the mass of people had flocked nearer to the high altar. Here the woman stopped, and throwing herself on her knees, while she put back her veil, her features might be seen working with uncontrollable emotions. As she clasped her hands and lifted up her face to the image of the Virgin, that smiled coldly and impassibly upon her, big tears coursed down her cheeks, while her trembling lips murmured, "Ave Maria, holy Virgin, look down upon me! While all the world rejoices in the light of sunshine and of joy, behold thy miserable handmaid, who intercedes with thee for mercy and for peace; not for me, oh! Holy Virgin—I will carry the burden which has been imposed upon me—but for one whom I love better than my life! Oh! thou who wast a mother, behold the anguish of one rightly named Magdalene, who trembles for the future of her babe, who feels the curse of a mother's

thoughts reeled, her frame, enfeebled by a morning of fasting, seemed to faint under her; before her gaze there was a film, and out of hazy clouds she seemed to see the image of the Virgin stretch out her hand towards her. She tried to rise, to follow her command, but her limbs refused their office, and she fell helpless on the marble pavement. Voices seemed to murmur in her ear, and spirits hovered round her, while she distinctly heard a clear, sweet ringing voice say to her in pitying tones, "Courage, Magdalene, your work shall be completed—go in peace." Then a drowsiness came over her, and again she saw the Virgin, but this time she had a smile upon her countenance, and the loud peal of the organ sounded joyfully forth in a hymn of praise, that seemed to Madeline like a melody from heaven. It rose and fell in majestic cadence—sometimes it was like the

wail of suffering souls crying for mercy, and again it poured forth soothing tones of heavenly reconciliation and peace ; and then it was the strain of sublime harmony, the song of the angels rejoicing over one sinner saved. Slowly and gradually it died away, the darkness grew more deep, the hum of voices ceased, and Madeline started as she felt a palpable human touch upon her shoulder.

Aroused from her blissful meditation, Madeline looked up, with the frightened, anxious, fawn-like glance which so often characterized her face, and beheld the erect, commanding form of her confessor looking sternly down upon her. Still under the influence of her religious rhapsody, she exclaimed, in thrilling, eager tones, "Padre, the Virgin has heard my prayer, she smiled upon me—I feel the peace of Heaven within my breast. Oh ! joy, to be able to suffer and prevail, thanks be to thee, oh ! holy

Virgin!" she continued, turning her tearful eyes upon the image. "I vow to thee eternal gratitude if thou wilt bring this thing to pass!"

As the priest gazed down with a slight scornful smile upon his lip, his hard, unflinching gaze bent piercingly upon the penitent. The agitated girl looked indeed a remorseful, repentant Magdalen; while he might have passed for the spirit of evil gloating over her agony—so hard, so unmoved he gazed, as if he could never have enough of so welcome a sight. At last he said, in a low, mysterious voice, "Madeline, come with me."

Obedient as a child, she strove to rise, but had he not caught her, she must have fallen, her limbs were so weak that she tottered as she tried to stand. He put his arm round her, which attracted and held her, as the action of the magnet

upon old iron. "Come out," he said. It was fortunate that he was there to support her, for as they came out of the oppressive darkness of the church into the broad light of day, a dizziness came over her, and her dazzled sight availed her nothing. He saw her weak condition, and hurried her to a near confectioner's, where he got her a glass of cold water, and made her eat a little food. It soon revived her, and she asked, her tones still tremulous with recent excitement, where he wished to take her.

"Madeline," he answered, still in his stern voice, "you have been praying, and your prayer has been answered—what more fitting moment to choose to perform an act of charity? I want you to come with me on an errand of mercy; and you will soon see where it is I mean to conduct you."

She silently acquiesced, and followed her confessor out of the shop. He hailed a cab,

and giving an address in a low voice to the cabman, they started off. Madeline, sitting back quiescently in her corner, was still engaged with her own thoughts, while to an observer it might have seemed as if the priest was unusually disturbed and agitated. The drive was short, and lasted only about five minutes, when they stopped at the door of a moderate-sized house in a good street. The Padre motioned to Madeline to descend, while he had already rung the bell, and as she saw where she was, she could not help saying, "Who can want any help in this sort of place?"

"Wait, and you will soon see," was all the priest replied, as the door was opened by a servant in plain clothes, who looked suspiciously at them; but after a few words from the priest, made way for them to enter.

The man's stare, and broad, vulgar grin, as he surveyed Madeline, made a disagree-

able impression upon her ; but she had not time to ask any more questions, as she was hurried upstairs, and shown into a sitting-room, redolent of tobacco, and in which reigned a curious mixture of luxury and discomfort. The chairs and sofas were covered with yellow silk, and the hangings were of the same, but they looked dingy and faded, and the heavy gilding on the ceiling and walls was grimy with dirt, and partly worn away. A strange litter of books, papers, manuscripts, musical instruments, pipes, and cigar-cases lay about on the tables, and encumbered the chairs, while in one corner of the room a large Newfoundland dog lay curled upon the floor, and growled ominously as the new-comers entered. Madeline wondered still more, as she surveyed the apartment, what possible errand of mercy there could be to execute here, and was turning once again with a question to her

guide, when he broke in with, "Stay here a moment, Madeline, and I will return to you immediately." He was gone before she could answer, and seeing herself alone she took heart, and approached the dog with insinuating caresses. He seemed to know she was no enemy, and allowed her to approach and pat him, and finally bury her little white hand amongst his soft, black, curly hair, while he wagged his tail, and looked up in her face with an expression that seemed to say, "I know you mean it kindly."

While she was thus engaged another door, concealed by a silk hanging, which she had not previously remarked, was thrown open, and an elderly man, with shaggy black hair, and a bold, sensual cast of countenance, made his appearance. Though it was late in the morning, he had on a flowered dressing-gown, over light linen trousers, and a gaudy smoking-cap was perched on the top

of his head. Madeline stood irresolute, her hand still buried in the dog's silky locks, and waited to hear him introduce himself, before she spoke. The new-comer looked admiringly at her and the dog, which made a graceful group, as they stood in the window, partly shaded by the curtain, and said, in a familiar sort of way,

“Well, my dear, and what have *you* come about?”

This singularly cool address caused Madeline to blush up to the roots of her hair, but she did not answer. He then advanced a step, and caught a glimpse of her face, which hitherto had been partly hidden. As he did so, and the full light shone on her graceful, shrinking form, he cried, in a tone of terror, “Leonor!” Then, seeing her look of utter astonishment, for she began to think she was closeted with a madman, and that this was rather more of an errand of mercy

than she had bargained for, he recovered himself, and said incoherently,

"I beg your pardon. I—really—you—pray, what is your name?"

"My name is Dormer," answered Madeline, quietly, advancing into the room; "and I think there must be some mistake. I was told to come here to assist some one in distress, but I see no one, and I should like to go."

"Well, pretty one," answered he, quite recovered from his sudden and unaccountable emotion, "you may console me if you like—sit down!" And he laid one hand familiarly upon her arm, to drag her down on to the sofa as he said these words. Madeline gave a half shriek of disgust, and sprang aside with the agility of fear.

"Let me go!" she exclaimed in wild tones. "Oh! where am I?—for pity's sake let me go!"

"The person who brought you here knew better than to leave the cage door open," he answered, contemptuously pointing to the door through, which Madeline had entered, and which her trembling hands were trying to unlock. "Come now, I don't want to hurt you; you'd much better sit down, and let us talk amicably, and be friends. I'm an easy-going fellow—you'll like me when you know me better. By Jove!" he muttered *sotto voce*, "she is a splendid creature—ten times as handsome as that child Celeste."

Madeline did indeed look beautiful, as in her feverish desperation, with the desperate, agonised look of a hunted stag at bay, she pulled with all her might and main at the rebellious lock, while her tightly closed lips told of the terror that possessed her. The man did not attempt to approach her, but watched her movements with mingled pity and admiration, much as the successful hun-

ter views the unavailing efforts to escape of the poor bird he has just netted.

"The likeness is wonderful," he soliloquised ; "the same fire in the eye, the same passionate vehemence. Ah ! Leonor, Leonor, you are almost avenged !"

Suddenly the hangings were pushed on one side, and another man entered, a fair, florid, glossy-countenanced man of about forty-five.

"Eliot !" exclaimed Madeline's tormentor, "how came you here ?"

"Well, I found no one in your bedroom, so I strolled in here, thinking to find you ; but if I intrude I will take my leave."

So saying, he gave a low whistle, and cast a half curious, half smiling look upon Madeline, who now stood erect and quiet, her eyes flashing from one to the other.

"Not at all, not at all !" said the first speaker, "this lady and I have finished our

business conversation. Pray permit me, madam," and with a mocking bow, he unfastened the door and let her out.

Madeline, who lost no time in making her escape down the stairs, never cast a look behind her. When she was gone, the modern Don Juan said,

"I'll trouble you, Eliot, another time, not to interfere with me or my visitors. What the devil brought you here, without further notice?"

"Well, my dear fellow," answered Eliot, as he took a cigar out of his friend's box, and balanced a patent vesta-match between his fingers, "I hadn't a ghost of a notion you were engaged; and how the deuce did you contrive to get little Mrs. Dormer to pay you these interesting visits? You'd better take care, lest it come to the ears of Arthur, he's as jealous as the devil himself of his pretty wife. I really am very sorry I sur-

prised you, but it's a capital joke to think of your having the little saint here."

And Eliot leant back in his chair, and laughed till the tears stood in his eyes.

"It's true enough—always mistrust a woman till you find her out; and your quiet, innocent little creatures are the worst of all. But to think of you, you old profligate, of all people, making such an impression! Poor Arthur!" And he laughed again.

Meanwhile the other, whom we may as well introduce again as Lord Mountjoy, sat biting his nails, with grievous vexation depicted on his countenance.

"Eliot," he began, not noticing the other's mirth, "did you not observe a wonderful likeness in that girl—in Mrs. Dormer—to—to Leonor?"

"To Leonor!—upon my word," answered Eliot, "I don't know what Leonor you mean. Is it Leonor the dancer, Leonor the singer, or

pretty little Leonor the dressmaker's apprentice, or dark Leonor, or fair Leonor, or *who* is it you mean? Your loves are so numerous, and so evanescent, I really cannot keep pace with them."

"Don't be a fool," rejoined the other, sharply; "you know whom I mean—the Italian girl whom——"

"Whom you deserted so basely?—ah! yes, I remember. Well, she was a lovely creature!—nature all over—and such affection! By Jove! that woman did know how to love! Do you know, Mountjoy, I've often wondered that little business never came out."

"Hush!" said Lord Mountjoy, looking anxiously round—"to tell you the truth, I believe there are some bloodhounds on the trail. I had a visit from a meddling, prosy priest not long ago, trying hard to pump me; but psha! that matter is dead and buried long ago."

"It's to be hoped it is," rejoined the other, knocking the ashes off his cigar; "you've got a host of fresh sins on your conscience since then; but the truth is, that Mrs. Dormer *is* a pretty woman. What eyes, and teeth like pearls! I declare I admire her more than the beauty, Lady Chillingworth, who, by-the-bye, is her sister-in-law. She's so cursed cold, too—I can't bear a woman who freezes you up if you look at her, and whose kiss, I am convinced, would have about as much warmth in it as an iceberg."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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